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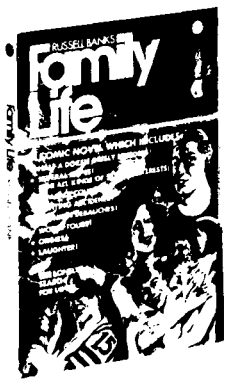

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PR2 1975-VOLUME XLII-NUMBER 2

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Points After . . .

CONSERVATIVE CHIC

In commenting on Tom Wolfe's jazzy piece on the art scene in a recent *Harper's*, I am disregarding the advice of my friends who insist you can't reply to a vaudeville act. All you can do, everyone said, is to characterize it, to treat it as a phenomenon.

True enough, one really can't reply to Wolfe's arguments, because they are not arguments but petulant and "clever" assertions so distorting and oversimplifying that they depend on the ignorance of his readers to be able to swallow them. And the prose, ah the prose, sounds not as though it came from a typewriter but had been blown through a clarinet, with its trills and frills, strutting and playing cute, tickling and cajoling the innocent reader.

But Wolfe does represent a new kind of mindlessness, and so far as I can make out, he does have some influence on that mass of half-educated people who busy themselves more and more with art and culture in this country, and are always in step with the latest trends. Now it is no secret that there is a new political conservatism in the air. But it is not so clear that it is accompanied by a parallel conservatism in the arts, where it is deceptively bouncy and free-wheeling and far out—and very democratic. The fact is, however, that in this country conservatism in the arts has often taken a populist, folksy, "realistic" form. And this is what Wolfe plays on, as he panders to the lowest common denominators of taste and the general dislike of abstract art which is associated with snobbish, anti-humanist attitudes. And because Wolfe sounds so hip and is connected with something called the new journalism—that journalist cult of personality that passes for sophistication—because Wolfe sounds so advanced, it does not occur to most of his admirers that he is peddling the most ignorant and backward prejudices.

Of course, it is easier today, when people are in a state of culture shock, to put over almost any notion as long as it looks new, pulls down established authority, and is able to go public. The kaleidoscope of movements, styles, and half-baked theories, in art and politics, has left most people dizzy and open both to anything novel and to the simultaneous debunking of it. So

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when Wolfe comes along and wises up people to the idea that the big abstract modern movement in art in America was a fake, they feel not only relieved that they no longer have to like anything they don't like but also, in this age of exposés, that they finally have the low-down on modern art. What could be better than to be educated to believe in your own prejudices.

Aside from the supposed entertainment value, the literary vaudeville, this is the educational service that Wolfe provides. It is almost impossible to sum up his argument, since it would involve making sense out of something that makes no sense. But it goes something like this. Abstract expressionism was put over by two burgs, Greenberg and Rosenberg, who not only puffed it with their critical writings but invented a theory which gave people the illusion they were looking at and liking the work, but was really a substitute for it. The theory, that is Greenberg's and Rosenberg's critical work, is reduced to a mishmash of two terms, flatness and action painting; and we are also given a quick resumé of art history in three-quarter time, simple and jazzy enough for busy executives. But, essentially, we are told, the entire American abstract movement was a conspiracy, unfortunately requiring the participation of the painters and sculptors themselves, with a few *cognoscenti* as accomplices. As Robert Scull, the great mind of modern art (whom Wolfe quotes approvingly) put it, no more than a hundred people, all below Tenth Street, were involved in this con game that fooled the museums, the directors, the art critics, the writers, and the intellectuals, generally.

But how did this happen? How did this conspiracy sweep the world, and become entrenched as the major current of the period? Because, says Wolfe, it became fashionable—which of course, is a tautology. All it means is that the fashion experts, like Wolfe, jumped on the bandwagon. But it also indicates that all Wolfe knows is fashion, the world of money, and chic, radical or conservative. All he knows—and in this he is a pure symptom of his time—is the social web spun around art by the buyers and sellers and the party goers and the media and the celebrity hunters. He hasn't the slightest notion—or perhaps I should say he spreads the popular uninformed notion—about how art movements develop and become established. He does not seem to know the most elementary fact: that art works and art movements are originally evaluated by the artists' contemporaries—other artists and critics—and are perpetuated by their influence on the art and thinking of later artists and critics. What Wolfe is reflecting—and promoting—is the popular myth that there is no objective way of determining the value of a painter or writer since the relation of reader or spectator to the art work is subjective, and that values are set by publicity and by the tides of fashion. Unfortunately, the workings of the arts are not always clear to people who are not engaged in them, so that from the outside they sometimes seem conspiratorial or the product of

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publicity, and particularly so today when café society, the chic magazines, and the popular media have appropriated the arts. Hence it becomes easier for a salon journalist like Wolfe both to mix up art with chic and to identify with the tastes of the common man—which turn out to have a lot in common.

It is also unfortunate that some of Wolfe's vulgar dismissal of American abstraction should coincide with the tastes of more serious critics. Thus Hilton Kramer, who is certainly not in Wolfe's dance class, but who has his own axe to grind against Greenberg, Rosenberg, and the abstract expressionists—partly because he favors a more naturalistic art—seems to me to be too easy on Wolfe when he concedes some truth in his exposé of the art world. For Wolfe is simply using the obvious connections between the art, money, and fashion markets to foul up the whole scene. And even when Wolfe discloses the faddism and modishness of the pop and post-pop show, it is not because he is agonizing over the loss of standards, or because he stands for something purer or more solid.

It is simply a case of conservative chic taking potshots at radical chic.

W.P.

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Alexander Mitscherlich

TWO KINDS OF CRUELTY

Brutal and cruel behavior by man to man punctuates the story of mankind. Cruelty reaches even into our fantasies about the next life. According to Christian belief, the horror of hellish punishment pursues the sinner into eternity. At the same time, the central cultural drama of Christianity, the passion of the crucifixion, is a cruel scene of execution. Hell symbolizes a definitive, eternal, and cruel punishment for infractions against the law. Nevertheless, this inexorable, cruel execution is to be acknowledged as an element of God's absolute goodness, power, and justice, as if God had no other way to negate cruelty than by means of cruelty.

There are other paradoxes in regard to cruelty. When an individual offence is in question, one is threatened with criminal punishment. The accusation is mainly based on the hypothesis of free will: the individual, it is assumed, could have avoided acting cruelly. On the other hand, and at other times, society induces thousands upon thousands of its members to visit the most cruel treatment upon its enemies. Guilt, we see, is dealt with on a group level very differently from guilt in an individual.

We can use these collective outbursts of rage to differentiate between cruelty and the impulse toward destruction. Cruelty is characterized by a distracting, pain-evoking and anxiety-evoking behavior towards members of our own species. But cruelty is not the only kind of aggressive-destructive behavior. In reckless passion we have destroyed large tracts of the natural ecology. The numerous

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extinguished and nearly extinguished species of animals suggest how effective we have been. We have changed, by our blindness to the consequences of our destructive powers, whole parts of the world into deserts.

The roots of this generalized aggressive-destructive behavior, and of cruelty, are the same: aggressivity that is not definitely focused genetically upon specific enemies or enemy patterns. Everybody can virtually become everybody's enemy. Here, we will only pursue man's ability to inflict pain and terror on other men, and on himself.

In recent years, great efort has been put into clarifying the concepts of aggressivity. The discussion has certainly not yet come to an end. Since I do not want to repeat what is known already, I will present here only the most summary rehearsal of the three main theories of aggressive behavior. No one of them can, in my opinion, describe the problem sufficiently; even taken altogether, they cannot. Apparently, there are still unknown and important elements to be accounted for.

The *first* theory holds that aggression is the expression of an instinctual drive. This means that aggression regenerates itself in biological processes which self-control, ego and superego functions must aim to check in order to prevent the lasting disruption of social interaction. A *second* conception sees aggression as the expression of disappointment over the failure of anticipated, instinctual gratification. According to this frustration theory, it is the friction which organizes and inflames agressive behavior. This theory operates on the stimulus-response schema; the stimulus in this instance proceeds primarily from the outer world, in contrast to the drive theory. There are also, however, self-disappointments which can awaken aggression directed against the self. According to a *third* theory, aggression is learned behavior. The human being, for the long period of his infancy utterly dependent on outside help, learns early and thoroughly that he has to behave aggressively if he wants to get his share, even if this behavior is in conflict with certain basic values and virtues which he has to learn to acknowledge as well. This third theory suggests that aggression might be avoided if society offered fewer examples of aggressive conflict-solving between individuals, or between individuals and groups; in other words, if society did not set a bad example. It is not without interest that we note that at the beginning of a new epoch of Chinese history, Mao Tse-tung has revived the old postulate that the human

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being is limitlessly educable, a notion that seems to imply the possibility of creating a society without destructive and cruel behavior, provided only that we develop the proper consciousness.

It is rather surprising that there have been few efforts to integrate these three theories. In fact, the most recent of these, the learning theory, has undertaken quite an aggressive effort of its own to be accepted as the only valid explanatory schema.

Psychoanalysis can claim to have developed its own drive theory of aggression—even if the developed theory does not have the same sharpness of definition as the libido theory. Libidinal and aggressive cathexes of the objects interfuse. In addition, ego and superego disapprovals or consents permanently modify the representatives of drives. By means of this supposition, psychoanalysis avoided the possibility that it might succumb to the danger of developing a simple drive model for aggression, and especially for cruelty. Most of all, the analysis of transference and counter-transference threw into relief the extraordinary complexity of real and fantasied object relations, including a vast array of destructive and cruel fantasies.

However, we must confess—and it is especially regrettable in connection with our understanding of the development of cruel behavior—that psychoanalysis still lacks, as H.I. Krysmanski has stated it, " . . . a differentiated understanding of society as the mediating system in which outer, cultivated nature, and inner, unfolding nature, objectify." It is to be hoped that psychoanalysis, with the development of just such a differentiated theory of society, will learn to designate those unconscious processes which take place in the individual, but which are generated by the participation of the individual in collective moods and in a general consciousness. In any case, psychoanalysis has shown in its development that it has not forgotten Freud's own development, that it is capable of accepting new experiences and incorporating them in its theoretical framework.

In what follows, we will consider not only "private cruelty," but equally the even more cruel behavior toward defenseless victims that is collectively inflicted, tolerated, and sometimes repeated through generations. The history of pogroms, taken as an example, shows what has been done step-by-step to minorities who are declared to be archenemies of a dominant group. They lose in their oppressors' eyes their identity as human beings. What is done under such dehumanized

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conditions to real human beings is approved by a collectively shared distortion of judgment.

The differential ranging of cruelty, depending on whether such acts are committed by individuals, cultural groups, or states, requires that we try to find the psychic mechanisms that influence people, especially the ways in which they feel themselves identified with the larger group, including all the group's virtues and powers, and with the perversions of these virtues and powers. Obviously, these identifications exist at different levels of critical consciousness when cruelty is inflicted by a single individual, as a criminal and contemptuous act, than when the cruelty is inflicted on a large scale, as in the persecution of a minority. Under the protection of the group, the strategy of the superego changes: it behaves like an opportunist, as a fellow-traveler against its former value orientation.

In the bitter, long-standing enmity between nations or tribes, we see cruelty liberated to a virtually incomprehensible degree. I hardly need to remind you of the Congo and the war between Nigeria and Biafra, or of the horrible extinction of the Armenians as described by Franz Werfel in *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*. This kind of proneness to cruelty, transmitted as a tradition, can become part of a national or cultural collective character. Yet we cannot follow this problem here either. We will also leave aside the reactive cruelty which can be inflamed by a wave of hatred in individuals, or a group, or a nation, when these people are recklessly prepared for murder and extermination of their opponents. Rather, we must speak of cruelty as a symptom. The measure of unharnessed torments, to which history bears witness inescapably, suggests a disturbance of object relations in the sense of cognitive error—such as scapegoating—or in the sense of the loss of the effective ability to step into another's shoes, that is, loss of empathy. In addition, the symptom of group cruelty demonstrates the inability of the individual to defend himself against the destructive beliefs of his society by mobilizing the forces of either his ego or superego. Effective resistance places the reasoning and resisting subject in the unavoidable position of a strange, suspicious outsider, close to an enemy.

When one observes the historic epidemics of collective cruelty, one notices that individual moral structures, which the ego is normally capable of mobilizing, melt away. The fact that destructive capabilities

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of such volcanic proportions can repeatedly paralyze and overrule the individual ego—perhaps even against one's conscious will—points emphatically to the participation of a drive. The unpredictable, unbridled character of such outbreaks, which have victimized whole peoples and races, can hardly be explained by resorting to notions of learning processes or frustrations aroused by the ordinary hardships of life. Yet beyond all this, we must also state that cruelty can often be found in camouflaged situations. The moment we stop observing human behavior from the outside alone, and begin to understand it in its conscious and unconscious motivational entanglements, we discover our self-deceptions. A severe and rigorous father, for example, may be unaware that he not only does no good by his educational methods of sharp punishment, but, in fact, acts out unconsciously his own disappointments when he was at the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid. Many such acts of bullying, and the like, prove to be determined not by the requirements of the circumstances, but by concealed motives which are satisfied by means of "rationalization" of the wish for self-assertion.

Let us now touch briefly on a question which is more complicated than one might expect. Has severe criminality increased? This is obviously a matter of real importance. People who think of destructive aggressivity as primarily an instinct-motivated behavior tend to answer, "No." People who think aggressive behavior between human beings is largely a consequence of frustrating experiences tend to answer, "Yes." My own hypothesis emphasizes the inflammability of aggression. Frustration not only releases genetically transmitted behavior patterns which serve for fight or flight, it also stimulates fantasies on the level of primary processes.

It is improbable in a highly administrated world—a world that is increasingly governed and manipulated by anonymous computers and less and less apparently by human beings—that unlawful behavior should not have changed. It is unlikely that the character of felonious acts has not responded in the last half century to certain frustrations which developed in the wake of a spreading technology and technocracy. A new style of life has come about, characterized by increasing bureaucratic constraints and increasing dependence on anonymous authority. The individual's response on the level of inner reality has been a chronic kind of depersonalization, alienation, and an estrange-

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ment from oneself. To use Erikson's term, there has developed a "diffusion of identity." The changing personality structure that has accompanied our recent civilization includes new types of psychopathological patterns of response, along with new variant forms of asocial behavior. Internalized superego control has been re-externalized on an unexpected scale. For example, shoplifting is common among young people, chiefly students. This behavior is performed with a pseudo-naive attitude, which suggests how strongly these people have regressed. The regressive craving for very early stages of blissfulness expresses itself in the enormous spread of the use of drugs—from aspirin to heroin, from sleeping pills to amphetamines. Addicts are no longer a marginal group who can be overlooked by pigeonholing them as psychopaths. Three hundred thousand narcotic addicts "buying and selling junk every day" in New York alone represents a rather important minority; important because of the severe psychopathological damage inflicted by the narcotic drugs. This psychopathology mirrors basic features of our society to a remarkable degree. Millions of people experience daily the same kind of reckless contempt for the object when they are pushed around in their working places, in bad schools, etc. This dehumanized behavior is even more clearly evident in those cold-blooded organizations called concentration camps, or work camps, where millions have been gassed or starved or exploited to death.

Further, and just as important in its impact on society, is the dangerous degree to which the alienation of our object relations has developed. Emotional estrangement in our social relations is clearly demonstrated in the attitude of "not getting involved." In Fall, 1972, Professor Wolfgang Friedman was stabbed to death at 4 p.m., and only a few blocks from Columbia University. A number of people witnessed the event. They stood motionless, perhaps watching in cold blood, perhaps too frightened to move, but in any case unable to give help to one who was in mortal need of immediate help. I believe that we must learn to perceive the way in which destroyed object-relations are interconnected. We all participate in these processes of emotional emptiness and narcissistic solitude, of inability to feel empathy for the helpless and humiliated.

Allow me to propose once again, here, the project of a careful psychoanalytic and psychosocial investigation of criminals in sufficient

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number. Because of the general public's ignorance, and especially that of the legal authorities, we were unable, after World War II, to investigate the whole administrative machine that Eichmann used, from the people who worked at the gas chambers up to the clerks in the government. The loss of such investigative data points up the great need for analyses of those cold-blooded or calculating murderers who are kept in our prisons. It is not only their individual cases which are at stake; it is the question of how fast our society may deteriorate because no one knows the causes of or the real motivations behind this, let us say, "disease."

Whatever may be the nature of the motivations for cruelty, one thing is obvious: until now it has not been possible to develop an educational system that (a) would cause the disappearance of aggressive responses by means of learning processes; or that (b) would put frustrations in a frame of reference where their traumatic effect is reduced, which would in turn prevent inflamation of the wish to act out of cruelty; and finally, that (c) would encourage such a strengthening of the ego capacities that the instinctual aggressive needs can be kept down to a bearable minimum. It is irrelevant which motive is at any given moment the overpowering one; the most "enlightened" attempts to reduce the level of aggressivity are defeated again and again by the strength of aggressive needs, whether the roots of aggression are instinctual or arise out of the experience of frustration. It is from such facts that research on peace and conflict must start.

We should not, however, draw fatalistic conclusions culminating in capitulation vis-à-vis aggressive outbreaks. Unquestionably, in certain parts of our culture, sensitivity in regard to the misuse of power and acts of torturous cruelty has increased considerably. It is only the accident of simultaneous existence that binds us to many of our contemporaries. In reality, hundreds of years of critical thinking separate us from many of them. It would therefore be false to speak of an unchangeable aggressive behavior on the part of all people. It is obvious that the development of critical doubt and rational-causal thinking has had an inhibiting effect on hostile behavior in some parts of the world.

At the same time, the persistency with which torture fantasies, at one time unimaginably aberrant, have again become reality cannot be understood in simple psychological terms. The theory of evolution

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offers no explanation for the human experience of pleasure in the pain of another human being. And yet we must postulate that this readiness to direct destructiveness against a fellow creature—far beyond what is necessary to ensure one's own security—must have developed historically.

The only psychological theory that does not turn away from the enduring phenomenon of cruelty because of either anxiety or moral scruples is Freud's theory of the death instinct. My inclination is to disregard the concept of "instinct," and to speak rather of a behavior pattern capable of being prompted by the most diverse contemporary circumstances (a "tendency," according to Lample-de-Groot's formulation). The origin of these energies that perpetually reproduce cruelty and, at the same time, suppress feelings of empathy and guilt remains unknown. The frustration hypothesis can do no more than establish a temporal connection between disappointment of an expected need gratification and aggressive reaction. Darwin's theory of evolution was, furthermore, never able to clarify how the strange "abberation" of human social behavior came to be. In man, a countless series of short-lived norms of social organization (so-called cultures) supplanted the instinctual regulations which have developed in the animal kingdom throughout the history of the world. Meanwhile, man has remained his own worst enemy. This contrast has come into sharper relief since it has become possible to eradicate almost all the important natural threats to the species. Now the species threatens itself. The capacity, characteristic of our species, to overpower the inhibition against murdering one's own kind continues blindly to operate, without fulfilling even a function of selection. The species thus endangers its own existence as a result of its scientific progress and concomitant skills.

In this interpretation, a phenomenon put in one perspective may be seen as simply the result of scientific research, and, in such a context, signal progress. At the same time, in another perspective, it may be viewed as part of a destructive process, the strategy of which we still understand only vaguely. The best known examples come from physics: the splitting of the atom brought about enormous technical progress, but it was immediately applied to warfare as a weapon of untold destructive power. The computer liberates some men from tedious labor, but it serves as a means of administration over other men.

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It is possible that the workings of the death instinct can best be observed in the perspective of large groups of those who are highly affected by emotions and display little insight. It is not a matter of individually motivated self-destruction, as in addiction, but of masses of people powerfully influenced to accept what seems like an attractive idea—and induced by it to act recklessly, even to sacrifice their own lives.

It is clear that the psychopathology of the individual has a limited effect on other people. The reverse is true in that the psychopathology of whole societies produces political consequences on a large scale. But we observe self-destructive processes and quasi-psychological epidemics on a less global scale as well. There are silent processes of self-deformation in passive adaptation to unfavorable surroundings, which undermine from within the ability to interact with people pleasantly. For a long period of time the secularized Calvinistic idea that poverty was a result of laziness and other inborn deficiencies was taken as a sufficient explanation of the phenomenon, with not a word about the participation of society in the matter. Today, comparable mechanisms must also be judged as working in the service of the death instinct. In the isolation of primary and secondary narcissism, the individual is doomed to perish.

If we observe the individual we discover that, during social periods that are relatively free from conflict, problems of the primary group are dominant in everyday life. In one way or another, most individuals feel included in the emotional household of other human beings. However, as soon as true believers clash about the question of what is right and what heresy, the scene shifts. Destructive emotions flare up, become dominant, and supersede or poison the individual's object relations. In this emotional self-alienation, the individual contributes to acts of destruction that he could never have conceived of himself. In his play, *The Rhinoceros*, Eugene Ionesco provided a pithy, symbolic metaphor of just such mechanisms.

I think the psychoanalyst is required to become familiar with such interactional structures as result from group or collective experiences, and not only from experiences within the primary family group. It behooves him to investigate the dynamics of unconscious processes not only in the dyadic situation, but also in persons who in certain respects are no longer individuals, but newly created collective creatures char-

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acterized by similar moods, inclinations, judgments, and prejudices. The behavior in question derives both from instinctual vicissitudes characteristic of current society and from such non-psychological influences as poverty, hunger, and overcrowding.

Furthermore, we must raise the question of what kind of reverberation the unintended side effects of progress in the individual leave—the limitless population explosion, the pollution of the human habitat, the thoughtless intervention in the ecological household of earth in innumerable places. It seems reasonable to assume that this progress could contain a core of self-deception, and that, in fact, it is part of quite a different strategy, that of the death instinct. Progress would then be an historical advance toward the extinction of mankind. This is certainly a pessimistic construction, and one that cannot be deduced from the fate of the individual, but only from those historical developments that have grown up over the generations, and which in retrospect we call "epochs."

In the face of these large-scale manifestations of the death instinct, namely the periodic outbreaks of destructive behavior, Eros must regain its field of action, as Freud saw. The question then arises: what chance is there for a revolt against overpowering emotions which apparently do not spring directly from the intimate conduct of one's own life, but from that of the group? And what about the revolt against realistic coercion, such as the consequences of population explosion, technocratic regimentation, and last but not least, the fetishism of progress?

Another element of cruelty which may be rooted in the death instinct is to be observed in the establishment of a regime of terror. The corruption, under the influence of real power, of a just revolution into a reign of terror has occurred repeatedly. Even with this danger, we must recognize that, for a conceivable future, certain unjust distributions of political power and property will only yield to change through greater power.

Political enlightenment should not be misinterpreted as a leap into an untenable pacifism. On the contrary, the necessary destruction of taboos has to be based on very exacting observations. Fearless questioning and accuracy of observation are of the essence here.

The strategy of rebellion against the huge power reservoirs of the bureaucracies has to be adapted to this kind of impersonal enemy, and

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requires different weapons than were available in the past. A change for the better will come about solely in answer to our ever-expanding insight (gained from observation), and the broadening of our self-awareness in a world which tries, beyond ideologies, to inhibit this process of maturation of groups.

In our enlightenment, we are constantly amazed by outbreaks of violence, of the most abhorrent persecutions and tortures all over the world. Perhaps our surprise stems from the fact that, until now, we have not had at our disposal a psychological explanation of the individual as a being willing to give up his independence when asked to kill and humiliate others of his own kind. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud makes this laconic statement regarding the two kinds of instincts: "... one of [them], the sexual instinct or Eros, is by far the more conspicuous and accessible to study."

Taking into account the numerous dark chapters in human history, we can only hope for better control over aggression through the continued evolution of the human ego. The tendency toward increased autonomous thinking in individuals is strongly opposed in mass societies by efforts—both conscious and unconscious—to condition behavior. Uncritical conformity is sought for a lifelong, easy manipulation of the individual in the crowd. We have accomplished little so far in this aim of strengthening man's ego, that is, his power of reflective thinking. This is in part demonstrated by the continuing high incidence of cruelty. In the milieu of our huge cities, cruelty has developed into an endemic pathology of interaction. We must take cognizance of the fact that in many political organizations, not just mastery, but cruel mastery, is planned and achieved. Nor should it feed our optimism when we ponder that no society in history has been able to arrest its decline by acts of cruelty; peaceful or bristling with arms, they all succumbed. None of them succeeded in finally overcoming the basic frustration of living in society, the "discontents of civilization." Whatever the primary energy source of cruel behavior may be, whether fed by instinctual energy or whether aroused by outer provocation, we cannot hope to solve our problems of aggression and cruelty by means of some "grand design" (like that offered by Konrad Lorenz)—let alone rely on it.

After this sketch of the interrelation between cruelty and aggression, we must now attempt to differentiate between two kinds of

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cruelty. To begin with, we must distinguish cruelty from violence: cruelty is refined violence. In the heat of an argument someone may punch someone else in the face; this is a form of expression, a wild, uncivilized one, but one which might also be lifesaving under certain circumstances. The spontaneous use of our physical force is part of the psychosomatic character of rage. This explosive fighting behavior in fury is different from cruelty. To blind someone, to skin someone alive, to put out a cigarette on someone's back during an interrogation—and to carry out such behavior in methodical and deliberate fashion—this must be invented and learned. It is not an inborn fight-or-flight behavior.

There is another important difference to consider: whether such actions follow *directives* or one's own initiative. As we have noted before, individual acts of cruelty, as well as of violence, stand under threat of punishment. If similar acts of cruelty, for instance, flogging, are declared to be in the public interest then not only are they not punished, but this systematic infliction of bodily pain and arousal of the fear of death is used by society as a method of mastery. Societies are particularly cruel when they are involved in strong emotional enmities. As Freud says: "A belligerent state permits itself every such misdeed, every such act of violence, as would disgrace the individual."

What is interesting in connection with such officially sanctioned acts of cruelty, and possibly not really explainable in psychological terms, is that there are always enough people at hand who are quite willing to inflict cruelty on the enemies, or imagined enemies, of their society. And more people yet condone such infliction of cruelty; even if they do not take an active part in it, they identify with a strong sense of inner agreement with such behavior. This is often observed during psychoanalytic treatment.

No matter how many times it is restated that the introduction of the death sentence statistically does not cause a diminution of crimes of violence, but rather attracts them in the way that opposites attract, the argument will be advanced that the death sentence is good, that it is a deterrent. The majority is prepared to reintroduce it, as we have recently seen in California.

We should keep in mind our definition of cruelty: cruelty is a behavior which *inflicts pain deliberately* and *gratifies one's own needs*. As physicians and medical specialists, we come in frequent contact

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with cases of individual cruelty, whether it is in the sense of manifest sexual perversion, namely sadism, or in serious sex crimes, such as rape accompanied by murder. Quite different from these single acts of terrifying cruelty is the genesis of mass murder. Take My Lai as an example, or Katyn, the mass murder of Polish army officers by the Russian army in World War II. Who conceives of such plans? Why and how is he effective in realizing them? As we know from a speech of Heinrich Himmler to S.S. officers, the planning of mass murder is by no means a spontaneous act. Premeditation of this type belongs to quite long-standing, paranoic systems; in Himmler's case it was the salvation of mankind from cunning "Untermenschen" (dehumanized human beings).* Closer scrutiny reveals that those fantasies represent impulses of an archaic, "prehistoric," destructive aggressivity. The ecstasy of destruction and murder is accompanied by feelings of omnipotence and sometimes of a messianic mission.

If one accepts the theory that we meet in these frightful murders the signs of instinctual motivation on a very primitive level, then we are able to explain how it is that these cruelties recur again and again. But in addition, we know that only a very strong ego could resist the spread of such a state of delusion, of omnipotent murderous destruction.

What is to be desired, then, is an education that gives a better understanding of self with regard to our basic instinctual aggressive needs, and that helps the individual not only to suppress destructive impulses, but to keep them in fantasy. These fantasies should not be encapsulated as in the state of repression; the critical ego should maintain access to them and be aware of them. This would mean that a psychological drama could replace factual tragedies.

All the suffering in concentration camps has taught us little about the origins of cruelty, and will not teach us much, so long as justice deals only with the principle of retribution. Many years ago, Paul Reiwald remarked that each society has the criminals it deserves. Yet we do not understand why we deserve Con-son or Auschwitz, with their perpetration of inconceivable brutality. And Japanese kamikazes

*Cf. Mitscherlich/Mielke, "Wissenschaft ohne Menschlichkeit. Dokumente des Nurnberger Arzteprozesses, Heidelberg, 1949." "Most of you have learned what it means when 100 corpses lie together, or 500, or 1000. To have endured this and—with the exception of cases of human weakness—to have remained decent, this has made us hard. This is a page of glory in our history never before written, and never again to be written." Heinrich Himmler, at a meeting of group leaders at Posen, October 4, 1943.

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or their Arab counterparts remain unknown beings to us. Such behavior is really cruel, asocial, and irrational. Nevertheless, there is also a kind of rationality in it. It is connected with unbearable, frustrating features of our society. What peculiarities of personality development could be uncovered in the Rio de Janeiro police officers who organized themselves into the "death squadron"? In the cause of their self-proclaimed pursuit of justice they fired more than 300 bullets into one of their victims. Three hundred bullets into a corpse—who does such a thing? And how is such behavior connected with official law and order?

The tormenting of man by man cannot be something that happens by chance, nor is it marginal and only a trait one finds in psychopathological minorities. We note once again, in this regard, the crucifixions common during the time of Christ. God's commandment to love your neighbor as yourself is idealistic and only partially realizable. Its intention is good, naturally, but one cannot say that it throws much light on man's need to satisfy cruel appetites vis-à-vis other men. We must try to find out more about the irresistible force which inflicted upon us the horrors of war and torture over the centuries. These horrors could not have been prevented even by our present level of enlightenment.

Our discussion does not include mental cruelty, although our basic definition of cruelty applies also to mental cruelty. Rather, we must further discuss the important question of whether there are two different kinds of cruelty: cruelty derived from sexual sources and, also, cruelty derived from aggressive sources.

Let us, therefore, compare the cruelty of the Marquis de Sade with the tortures and murders committed in the name of faith and ideals, with undisguised mass mania. In all the different perversions which de Sade represents in his books, we are dealing basically with unmistakable sexual-genital gratification brought about with the aid of infliction of pain and suffering. As baroque as de Sade's fantasies may be, the object remains, for him, an object for love. In the murderous acts which are described in his book, *The 120 Days of Sodom*, he remains an unhappy lover as well as an unhappy human being.

De Sade's love object has to be preserved. The fanatical rage with which enemy life and environment are destroyed in wartime, in the terror and counter-terror of civil wars, suggests a quite different kind of

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cruelty, a cruelty which decidedly aims at the destruction of the hunted object.

The two kinds of cruelty between which we are attempting to differentiate, therefore, could be briefly defined as *pleasure-oriented cruelty* (*Grausamkeitslust*) and *task-oriented cruelty* (*Grausamkeitsarbeit*). Pleasure-oriented cruelty stems from an early inversion of libidinal experience. Task-oriented cruelty is aggressively, but asexually, destructive. The fascinating personality of de Sade has seduced us into considering primarily sexual forms of cruelty in psychoanalytic literature. De Sade, the most dramatic representative of a relatively rare perversion, became the prototype by which the quality of human cruelty has been studied. Whoever has read *Justine* or *The 120 Days of Sodom* knows the manic compulsive and deadly monotonous gratification of perversion. One thing is clear: the contact with the object, via cruel manipulation, in sadistic object relations results in genital discharge. Torture is a means to a genital sexual end; orgasm occurs during the torture. The object's signs of suffering serve the purpose of heightening sexual-genital pleasure. In mild form, this kind of playful infliction of suffering is to be found as part of sexual foreplay.

In the case of task-oriented cruelty—a cruelty which is performed like physical labor—there is almost no cooperation between sexual and destructive drive gratifications. There is no sexual pleasure in the putting out of a cigarette on the back of a victim during an interrogation, or the pushing of wood splinters under fingernails. The conception and execution of torture and killing methods can take on the proportions of wild destructiveness in the fanatic, but they are clearly to be distinguished from sexual orgasm. The *destruction worker*, whose organization has given him his job in the gas chambers, goes home in the evening with the same feeling other people have of having put in a good day's work. He has not experienced sexual pleasure or excitement in the course of it. To be sure, in reality one can find fusions of sadistic pleasure-seeking with cruelty as labor. But this does not seem to be the rule.

There are few torture victims who have given testimony of their experience, yet the testimony that does exist clearly underlines the difference between torture and sadistic perversion. Jean Améry, in a conversation we conducted on the subject of torture, assured me that in the world of concentration camps he never met anyone in command

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who seemed overtly to derive sexual pleasure from the tortures. I remember that Max Horkheimer, years ago, also spoke of the difference between political and sadistic manifestations of cruelty. The latter ends in orgasm, at least temporarily. What we describe as task-oriented cruelty can proceed in never-ending pain, like the shift work in a mine, and is of a rather compulsive nature.

If we were to venture a hypothesis, it would run something like this: in cruelty as labor—as opposed to sadism—libidinal and destructive drive processes tend to be strictly separated from each other. A deep-seated separation of drives has taken place. Sexual and aggressive modes of excitation do not alloy; rather the personality structure is that of the multiple-personality type, characterized by a periodical and vast externalization of the superego: the murderer and loving father and husband all in one, as was found in the Auschwitz commandant Höss. The origin of this form of destructive cruelty cannot be explained as a defense against the fear of sexuality, as in the compulsive neurotic, because the private sex life of such individuals who commit socially sanctioned cruelty reveals little or no disturbance.

The inner doubling of the personality has obviously some connection with the lack of guilt feelings one can observe in these perpetrators of cruelty. When not commissioned to murder, such people are positively harmless. They can cast off their roles in the Wehrmacht or S.S. like the lizard casts off its tail; this has been amply proven by events after 1945.

We must now ask ourselves what infantile instinctual vicissitudes cause these individuals to kill and maim fellow creatures—clumsily or elaborately, fanatically or in dumb obedience. Perhaps it will aid in our clarification if we observe the circumstances in which these outbreaks of cruelty occur. It appears that many people are moved to cruelty when the victim is *defenseless*. This must be of overriding significance, because this very defenselessness allows, on the part of the victimizer, an experience of omnipotence undisturbed by the victim. Regularly, cruel acts are extended when, in consequence of the enemy's defeat, one's own mortal fear disappears, and a chance is thus given to play with the foe's terror and pain. This helps recreate the very early feeling of infantile, narcissistic omnipotence. The killing of the defenseless victim is the perverse reversal of the urge to protect, normally evoked by powerlessness. In wars of faith and ideology, the possibility of

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torture and killing signifies, unconsciously, the triumph over the values and ideals of the enemy, over everything that makes him strong. The defenselessness is interpreted as a sign of his weakness and unworthiness. Therefore it arouses no pity. Cruelty is carried out remorselessly, according to regulations. In the witch-hunts of the Inquisition, this acting out of paranoid fears, which are to be defended against by a paranoid counter-system (that of exorcism of the devil), must have played a decisive role.

"Torture is the ghastliest experience a man can harbor within himself" wrote Jean Améry in his essay, "On Torture." It is interesting that we are only inadequately informed—perhaps even totally uninformed—of the intrapsychic constellations which produce such gruesome behavior and such indelible experiences. One of the reasons for this is the "normality" of this cruelty. Research on My Lai has shown that participants in the massacre by no means consider themselves pathologically deviant members of their society, but instead easily play the role of patriots in the service of their country. Millions of their fellow countrymen, and people all over the world, follow this interpretation without opposition. If by chance these soldiers or officers became witnesses to the "love play" of a real sadist, they would put a stop to his actions and pass moral judgment on his behavior.

The cruelty worker who, in a concentration camp or a torture chamber, has the upper hand and cannot claim to act in self-defense or out of fear, apparently is free of any pangs of conscience after the fact. His conscience is intermittently silent, both during the act and after his return to normal life, perhaps because he is able to divest himself of that part of his personality—his now multiple personality—with the same ease with which he takes off his uniform. What Améry said of the victim of torture, that he must continue to live with the memory of a terrible experience, apparently does not hold true for the torturer. Nazi murderers reintegrated with ease into the society of the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic, where they committed no crimes of passion or other acts of violence. Their conscience adapted to the new situation and functioned once more.

Another thing about these bureaucrats of cruelty is that the object of their activity appears to be almost interchangeable. It seems to matter little whether they are shipping scrap metal or murdering thousands or millions of condemned enemies in their machines of

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annihilation. The destruction that they are so willing to practice becomes merely a problem of a successful bureaucratic organization, of which they can be proud.

"Conscience," Freud said, "is, at its root, nothing more than social fear." When society offers the license to obtain satisfactions that normally are unavailable, perhaps even unimaginable, many an individual's ego cannot resist the temptation to regress and, under cover of the destructive fantasies of the *society*, act out fantasies of the early anal-sadistic libido organization. It is quite probable that, in the process of realization, destructive pleasure, comparable to sadistic pleasure, takes place. But this pleasure is the *pleasure of aggressive cruelty*; pleasure that goes hand in hand with the assertion of superior power and with the experience of the "grandiose self" (Heinz Kohut). The S.S. man, who during the "cleaning out" of the Warsaw ghetto grabs a baby by the feet and shatters him against a wall, does not thereby enjoy a sexually pleasurable experience, but one of a primary process, omnipotent type. He is like Shiva, a god of destruction.

There appears to be no small number of such infantile character types who prefer this kind of gratification to sexual pleasure. And therefore there is always the danger that, in a new encounter with a charismatic leader, such people will once again be prepared for any form of annihilation of their fellow men, provided the killing can be combined with a bureaucratic goal, as when the killing itself becomes such a goal.

Along with this we must also take into account the fact that the drive toward destructive gratification in an unknown number of people can be kept in check only by means of careful surveillance and severe threat of punishment. For those people, life in any society is exceedingly uncomfortable.

This faulty "socialization" implies a character formation easily open to violence and cruelty, caused by damaging educational methods, by the tradition of violence, by the inadequacies of the counter-tradition of kindness. Without the threat of retaliation according to the law of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," such individuals are always ready to turn someone weaker into a victim of their destructive primary process fantasies and their compulsive stunts of violence. Where this is linked with social approval, ideal images and projection of aggression unto the victim, infantile omnipotence

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fantasies are activated and pleasure in torture and humiliation is strengthened.

Where by tacit agreement, cruelty is socially permissible, total satisfaction in murderous destruction still must not ensue. Rather, a circle of victims must remain alive to bear constant witness to the fact that the weaker are at the mercy of the stronger. Any resistance on their part only escalates the torture. Such are the daily premiums tied in with the task-oriented cruelty.

If we now cast a backward glance, it becomes clear that cruelty, as an expression of sexual perversion, hardly constitutes a social danger. Only a handful of collectors of perverse literature have been able to take up de Sade's daring challenges. Eichmann, on the other hand, was made of different stuff. He supplied killing the way one provides a supermarket with merchandise. If the traces of the death instinct are to be found anywhere, they appear to me to be recognizable in this second form of cruelty.

Are we then helplessly condemned to the road to Apocalypse herein sketched out? In earlier episodes of man's history, this was indeed the case, and the human sacrifices were huge. We should therefore concern ourselves with the *vicissitudes of the aggressive drive*—especially in its search for gratification unmixed with moderating libido—rather than with the sexual-aggressive perversion of the Marquis de Sade, who was himself heavily tortured by his perversions and who still remains a remarkable writer. Compared with Eichmann and others of his ilk, he emerges as a positively likable figure.

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Laura Adams

EXISTENTIAL AESTHETICS: An Interview with Norman Mailer

Int: Since the late 1950s you've had a vision of God and the Devil at war for possession of the universe, a vision that has been the metaphysical and moral center of your work. Has that vision changed appreciably over the years?

Mailer: I don't know the answer. When you deal with cosmology, the question becomes on one hand enormous—do God and the Devil war in the galaxies?—yet is intimate on the other. Since we all have our own idea of God and the Devil, it's hard for the idea not to change, even fluctuate. I'd say that over the last ten or fifteen years I've kept going back and forth in my mind over a notion that's hard to formulate, and I don't know that I should try—it's the sort of thing that sounds silly unless you can write a book about it—but for the purpose of this answer, just let me say that if there is a war continuing between God and the Devil for humankind, for the *future* of humankind, then this war is much more complex than a simple confrontation. We have to ask ourselves what the role of technology is in all this, and I've had years when I've believed technology is an instrument of the Devil, other years in which I've seen God in a Faustian contract with technology. Technology is perhaps some third force, some element that's come into our universe from other universes. Now all this is so endlessly and chronically paranoid, that it's hopeless, I think, to try to talk about it in the form of an interview. I think you can dramatize these notions in a major novel, but only a major novel. You would wreck a minor novel by introducing such ideas. Therefore to talk about it in an interview is hopeless. It leads to people saying you have a windmill for a brain. Still I can see by the look in your eye that you're hardly ready to give up.

Int: Isn't it an obsession, a form of paranoia, or even atavistic to think that there are cosmic forces manipulating us for their own ends?

Mailer: Well, I've never felt we are the simple creatures of these forces. On the contrary, I think they are fighting for our allegiance or even our unwitting cooperation. It isn't only that man needs God, but recall us to the title of

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that old French movie, "God Needs Men." (Of course you couldn't use such a title today. You'd have to say "God Needs *Persons*.") Here's what I'm trying to say: To the degree I have any intense religious notion it's that when we fail God we are not merely disappointing some mightily benign paterfamilias who'd hoped we might turn out well and didn't. We are literally bleeding God, we're leeching Him, depriving Him of *His* vision. You see, I start with the idea that the explanation for our situation on earth may be that we are part of a divine vision which is not, necessarily, all loving, but on the contrary is a vision which wishes to take us out across the stars—a vision of existence at war with other varieties of existence in the cosmos. Flying saucers may be, or may represent, at least, a certain unconscious human awareness that there is this possibility in the universe, that there are other forms of intelligence which have nothing to do with us. Nothing even to do with our divinities.

Int: Do you know the Arthur C. Clarke novel, *Childhood's End*?

Mailer: No.

Int: In it the human race mutates into an essence, a form of energy, that unites with a kind of benevolent Oversoul which, interestingly, has used another race of benevolent beings in the form of devils to prepare the way for the human mutants. It appears that our fear of devils was based on a premonition that they would have something to do with the dissolution of our race. The unconscious awareness you spoke of reminded me of this. But isn't this notion that, as D.J. expressed it in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, "You never know what vision has been humping you through the night," contradictory to the perception of good and evil in *An American Dream*? There it seemed that good and evil were for the most part clearly demarcated, known to Rojack. Deborah and Barney Kelly were evil; Cherry was good.

Mailer: That was his view of it.

Int: His view of it?

Mailer: That was all it was—Rojack's view of it. To the degree a reader sympathizes with Rojack, that would be the reader's view of it. To the degree a reader decides that Rojack is an absurd hero, he won't go along with that view. But even assuming that Rojack's view had something to do with *my* view of the characters, I was certainly attempting to make Deborah more complex on any spectrum of good and evil than Barney Kelly. Barney Kelly was supposed to be the focus of evil in the book.

Int: The Devil personified.

Mailer: Well, the Devil approached, anyway. Whereas Deborah was someone who was, in quotes, "in thrall" to the Devil. But a woman of complexity, not altogether unacquainted with goodness.

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Int: And Cherry?

Mailer: I didn't mean Cherry to be all good by any means. To the degree that she's better than she ought to be, she's too sentimental a character. A gangster's moll is not the simplest kind of goodness we arrive at. But I wanted to indicate some characters had more purchase on good than others.

Int: Cherry seemed to have a hard kernel of goodness even though she was surrounded by corruption.

Mailer: I think she's finally an enigmatic character. In my opinion, she's the weakest character in *An American Dream*. I think people who don't like the book have their strongest argument starting with Cherry. To a great degree, I'm afraid she's a sentimental conception. We don't really know much about her. We're asked to believe that this goodness exists in her but we don't have any idea of the real play of good and evil in her. She's a shadowy figure. Of course, my cop out is that she's seen through Rojack's eyes. He's in an incandescent state of huge paranoia and enormous awareness. He's more heroic and more filled with dread than at any point in his life. So he comes in like a lighthouse in the fog. What else does one do in such a state but fall madly in love for twenty-four hours and lose the love? It would have taken more wit than I possessed to have made her a character of dimension under these circumstances. Perhaps she did have to appear as a sentimental figure. Still I think there's no getting around it, she's the first weakness of the book.

Int: But it's a highly metaphorical novel. One of the mistakes many critics made in first reviewing it was to take it too literally. Isn't Cherry seen metaphorically as love, the reward of courage?

Mailer: Well, no. I don't believe a metaphorical novel has any right to exist until it exists on its ground floor. You know I never start with my characters as symbols. I'm unhappy if I can't see my characters. I mean, I not only have to know what they look like, and how tall they are, whether they're good looking or plain, but I also like to have some idea of what they smell like. So I had a pretty good idea of Cherry *physically*, a very clear idea in fact, but I would have been happier if her character had emerged somewhat more. I think Deborah, for instance, is vastly more successful. Deborah is worthy of a book in herself. In fact, at one time I thought idly of doing a book on Deborah, and then chose not to. But how she drew coincidences to herself. One of the things about *An American Dream* that's not often realized is my little theory, if you will, that as events become more dramatic so does the play of coincidence become more intense. You can reverse it. You can say that coincidence may fail to occur unless events are dramatic. I think there's a reason for that. If you believe in Gods and Devils, and I choose the plural because not only is God on one side, Devil on the other but they certainly

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have armies, adjutants, aides, little demons, their angels, their what have you, well, when important events occur why wouldn't they be concerned? Why wouldn't they be present? Why not try to tip the scales? Why wouldn't God and the Devil have their department of dirty tricks? You know, see them as some sort of sublime extension of the CIA.

Int: That is why I see the novel as so highly metaphorical. The kinds of experiences Rojack has, the vision of shooting arrows into Cherry's womb while she's singing in the night club, for example, seem to me to exist in a dream allegory but not at the literal level.

Mailer: I would disagree. I'd had the experience of being in night clubs and thinking evil thoughts and really barbing them like darts and sending them to people and seeing them react. At the time I didn't know whether I was profoundly drunk or, you know, was I all alone in the world? But I had to recognize that there was a psychic reality to it. It wasn't just a fantasy. Since then, there's been any amount, my God, there's so much material now to indicate that this is not at all unreasonable. For one thing, we do have telepathic powers, we talk about the human aura, about the ability to send hostile vibrations, everybody uses that phrase, but, you know, if you can send a hostile vibration, which is to say, a hostile wave, why not employ modern theories of light and say hate appears not only in the form of a wave but also as a particle? If you can do it with light, you can do it with hate. In other words, send a damn particle into someone. Why not assume you can sting someone with a thought so concentrated that they'll turn around and rub the back of their neck? Now, I invite people who are reading this interview to try it from time to time. It helps if you're drunk, of course.

Int: Is that what you've been doing to tape recorders all these years?

Mailer: Oh, I think there's a good reason why tape recorders bomb out on me. Why not assume we have electrical powers—we know there are pictures taken of the human aura in Russia. What is it called, the Kirlian process? Did you ever notice when you're in a real hurry to make a phone call, and you've got one of those button phones where you can dial quickly, that if you dial too quickly with too much desire, you never get your number?

Int: Yes.

Mailer: Then you have to stop and say, "Okay, I don't really care if I get the number or not," and dial more slowly. Then the phone becomes your servant again. It's as if there's an electrical resistance to your electrical intensity.

Int: I simply assumed the computer couldn't handle the digits as fast as I could push them.

Mailer: Well, I notice it with a dial phone, too. The phenomenon is not only in the speed with which you dial, but the intensity with which you want to

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get that call through. It's almost as if there is something in the center of electricity that mocks us. I've felt this with all sorts of electrical phenomena. It's possible I'm more charged, have more electricity about me. I don't mean that as any agreeable or attractive condition, it's bound to be disagreeable, but possibly I could have more effect upon electrical instruments than other people, a little more effect, ten per cent more, whatever. At any rate, to go back to *An American Dream*, my point is that there wasn't a single phenomenon in that book that I considered dreamlike or fanciful or fantastical. To me, it was a realistic book, but a realistic book at that place where extraordinary things are happening. I believe the experience of extraordinary people in extraordinary situations is not like our ordinary realistic experience at all. For example, one of the reasons I've never written about great prizefighters in a novel is that the experience they have in the ring is, I think, considerably different from what we believe it is. More intense, more mystical, more "spooky" if you will, than anything we see on the outside. Who wants to write about a fight the way sportswriters do, or even as fighters discuss it after the fight: "I was waiting to set him up with a good right. He dropped his guard and I popped him." That's the way they talk. Only, it isn't their experience.

Int: I grant you that the characters in *An American Dream* perceive and experience reality altogether differently from us ordinary folks. Still, it seems to me that their literal reality has a metaphorical level as well, just as your literal realities nearly always turn into metaphorical ones linked to the central set of metaphors regarding the existence of God or the Devil. I've come to see them as metaphors for our moral directions, which in the absence of absolutes become existential, unknowable as good or evil.

Mailer: My metaphors explain more phenomena to me than any theology I can adopt. I was an atheist for years because I couldn't stomach the notion of the all-good, all-powerful God who calmly watched all sorts of suffering which by any extension of our human imagination could not be productive of anything, not even productive of future karma. In other words that whole waste of human possibilities of the most grinding, grim, dull sort. It seems to me that the only explanation is God is not all-powerful: He's merely doing the best He can.

Int: But how literally does God exist?

Mailer: I believe He exists literally.

Int: How?

Mailer: It's not for me to know how or where He exists. It's reasonable to assume He exists in a great many ways, in places we can comprehend and a great many where we cannot. All I'm saying is that He does not have to be all-powerful. What is there that makes Him all-powerful? He was powerful

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enough to have created our solar system, perhaps. And if you ask what are His limits, that might be my guess. But this is babbling. It isn't important where God's limits are. What's significant is the idea that God is not all-powerful, nor is the Devil. Rather it is that we exist as some mediating level between them. You see, this notion does restore a certain dignity to moral choice.

Int: Of course, it does.

Mailer: It becomes important whether you're good or bad.

Int: In trying to know what is good or evil aren't you in effect trying to take existentialism to its logical end, that is, to end existentialism?

Mailer: Not end it, seat it. Of all the philosophies, existentialism approaches experience with the greatest awe: it says we can't categorize experience before we've experienced it. The only way we're going to be able to discover what the truth about anything might be is to submit ourselves to the reality of the experience. At the same time, given its roots in atheistic philosophers like Sartre, existentialism has always tended toward the absurd. By way of Sartre, we are to act as if there were a purpose to things even though we know there is not. And that has become the general concept of existentialism in America. But it's not mine. I'm an existentialist who believes there is a God and a Devil at war with one another. Like Sartre in his atheism, I offer a statement of absolute certainty equally founded on the inability to verify it. Atheism is as removed from logical positivism as theology. Still, I don't give a God damn if I can verify this or not. There has to be something out there beyond logical positivism. I want my brain to live. I want to adventure out on a few thoughts. The fact that I can never demonstrate them is not nearly so important to me as the fact that I may come up with an hypothesis so simple, so central, that I may be able to apply it in thousands of situations. If it begins to give me some inner coherence, if I begin to think that I know more as a result of this philosophy, why not?

Int: But isn't what you've identified as existentialism, extended to its logical end, seeking to know what is finally unknowable?

Mailer: That's not my definition of existentialism. I'd say we find ourselves in an existential situation whenever we are in a situation where we cannot foretell the end. Some of these situations are grave. If you get into a skid on an icy road, at a speed that's uncomfortably high, you don't know if you're going to be able to pull your car out of it without a smack up. That's an existential situation. When people talk about it afterward they think of that quality of time when it is slowing up. The first time people connect with marijuana—not the first or the twentieth time they smoke it, but the first time they *connect* with it—they're in an existential situation. It's not the

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universe they have been sitting on all the time. It's slower, more sensuous, more meaningful, more natural, but filled with awe. The light tends to have a little of the hour of the wolf, a light close to lavender or purple, that light you get on certain kinds of evenings, or very early on certain kinds of dawns full of foreboding. But it's—there are all kinds of situations. A woman losing her virginity is in an existential situation. Of course, part of the comedy of twentieth-century technology is that it's gotten to the point where a woman can lose her virginity without being in an existential situation for a moment. It's all exactly the way she thought it was going to be, she's been so well oriented.

Int: I think that assumes that her partner is not also a virgin. . . . All right. Your basic existential situation is a situation anyone enters at any moment in time when the end result of his actions is unknown. But isn't to a larger extent your aim in all the work that you've been doing to uncover what is essentially good or evil in our natures and God's nature when that kind of thing is actually unknowable? What I was going to suggest earlier in talking about the demarcations of good and evil in *An American Dream* is that you seem to have become increasingly obsessed since that time with your inability to know what is good and what is evil.

Mailer: You say I'm obsessed, but where would be the literary proof of that? What books would show that?

Int: Start with the case of Richard Nixon in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* and *St. George and the Godfather*: your inability to know or to intuit whether Nixon is basically good or basically evil; to know, in *Of a Fire on the Moon*, whether our space program will carry God's vision to the stars or the Devil's; to know in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* whether America has made a Faustian compact with the Devil or whether God is using us for evil ends; whether or not our national leaders and events win or lose us ground in this divine battle. It seems to me that you lead us to this question, with increasing desire to know the answer, in every work.

Mailer: Well, it could be said that all I'm doing is leading people back to Kierkegaard. I'd remind you I've written this several times: Kierkegaard taught us, or tried to teach us, that at that moment we're feeling most saintly, we may in fact be evil. And that moment when we think we're most evil and finally corrupt, we may, in fact, in the eyes of God, be saintly at that moment. It's a Dostoevskian, Kierkegaardian notion. Its first value is that it strips us of that fundamental arrogance of assuming that at any given moment any of us have enough centrality, have a *seat* from which we can expound our dogma, or measure our moral value. So we don't have the right to say Richard Nixon is: A. good; B. evil. I might have my opinion of Richard Nixon, but I don't have the right to say that man is evil, any more

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than I have a right to say he is good.

Int: Do you have a clear notion of the good?

Mailer: No. But I have, if you will, I have and I submit to the force of this word, I have a fairly well-formed cloud of intuitions about the nature of the good, and, like a cloud, it has to a certain degree a structure, and yet the structure is capable of altering quickly, depending on the celestial winds blowing and the less celestial winds. A cloud changes shape quickly but it remains a cloud. It's not just simply an unformed chaos.

Int: You've said that an evil person is someone who has a clear notion of the good and operates in opposition to it.

Mailer: Therefore by my own definition I'm definitely not evil.

Int: All right, but are you wicked?

Mailer: Unquestionably wicked, yes.

Int: By your own terms, which is not knowing what is good or evil in any situation, but upping the ante each time.

Mailer: Upping the ante, yes. I'd say I may be one of the most wicked spirits in American life today. Maybe. America may be changing faster than I am.

Int: Is it fair to say that your existentialism is leading us to know the nature of good and evil?

Mailer: It's leading us to—well, let me take a detour. People who submit to logical positivism, and go on from there into philosophies as difficult as Wittgenstein's, will answer if you ask, "Why go through these incredible disciplines in order to verify the fact that you're able to verify the wing span of a gnat but not of an archangel?" They will answer, "Well, it isn't what we are able to verify that is interesting, so much as that we go through a discipline which enables us to think cogently. We're less likely to go in for sloppy thinking thereafter." That's the value of it. I'd say by going in for my variety of associational, metaphorical thinking (which is, of course, the exact opposite) I may be able eventually to think speculatively without feeling philosophical vertigo. You see, it doesn't take any more illogic to posit that there's a god or devil than it takes to say there is none. The latter statement is absolutely as potent an act of faith. There's a marvelous line in *Jumpers*, the play by Tom Stoppard, to that effect. I paraphrase: "Well, maybe atheism is that crutch people need to protect themselves against having to face the enormity of the existence of God." You know, once you contemplate the notion that there is a God and this God may be embattled, the terror you feel is enormous.

Int: It's a terror, but isn't it also paranoia?

Mailer: No. The terror is not that some force is working on you to ruin you. It's another kind of terror: It's that nothing is nailed down. That we are out there—that our lives are truly existential. That we're not going to end up

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well, not necessarily. You see, there's always been this sort of passive confidence implicit in Christianity, the confidence that things are going to work out all right. One does have to die, that's true, but if one keeps one's nose reasonably clean, one is going to heaven. That gave security to everybody. The ship of state was built on that security. The ship of state was nailed down. It didn't travel the stormy seas. Rather, it was carried by the strongest pallbearers of the nation. And what's happened now is we're entering an existential period in our history where nothing is nailed down. All the American faiths, one by one, are being exploded. We lived for too long in a paranoid dream world that believed communism was the secret of all evil on earth because it was the social embodiment of the Devil.

Int: That's paranoid.

Mailer: That's paranoid. But I don't believe the Devil is the secret of all evil on earth. I believe something more complicated than that. I think God might be the source of a considerable amount of evil. Because if God is embattled, He could fail to take care, much to His great woe, of people who are devoted to Him, in the same way that a general might have to surrender soldiers on a hill. And those soldiers could give up with great bitterness in their hearts.

Int: You've talked about evil in one sense as God's shit, God's excrement.

Mailer: Where did I say that?

Int: It comes up in "The Metaphysics of the Belly." A colleague of mine once remarked that it's but a step from scatology to eschatology and I've often thought of this remark with regard to your work. Now I'm interested in the relationship between excrement and eternity. If God's shit is evil, but shit is associated with the Devil, doesn't this imply that God creates evil?

Mailer: There are references in my work to the idea that shit and the Devil have an umbilical relation, but it's not my idea after all. Luther had a few notions about it.

Int: As did Jonathan Swift.

Mailer: It's an idea that goes—it starts with the most primitive peoples. It goes all the way. There's a reason for it. Shit is what we reject, at least to the degree that the shit felt it deserved a better end for itself. In other words, a lot of our shit has nutrients in it, worth in it. It's just that the body couldn't take it, and so passed it out. Some of the best of the food goes out with the shit as well as some of the worst. That's what I said in "The Metaphysics of the Belly." All right. To the degree that we can loosen our imagination to assume this stuff might have a soul, after all we're beginning to discover now that plants have feelings and souls, so it may be that food, even though in a peculiar relation to life, not as alive as a plant, let's say, or as an animal, but still alive to a degree, has a mood, has a spirit, has something. If food

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feels it has been violated, suppose it can die with a curse. Of course, the Devil loves to be around and pick up those who die with a curse. Malcolm Muggeridge once had Sister Theresa of Calcutta on a television show with him. Muggeridge, who is by any measure a devoutly religious man, had just written a book about Sister Theresa and obviously revered her. He told me what she used to do in Calcutta. Her order of nuns would take people who were dying on the street and move them into her convent where they'd die anyway a few days later—they didn't begin to have medicine to take care of them or anything like that—but her notion was, and Muggeridge was moved by this, and I agree that it is a moving idea, was that she didn't want them to die with absolutely nothing. She wanted them to be able to come in and get a little attention before they died so they wouldn't go out with a complete bitterness in their hearts. Now that is a religious woman. The recognition that one not die with a curse is fundamental to any inquiry into what could be the possible nature of God and the Devil. If God is embattled, and can't give fair justice to all, then what of those who do not achieve what they saw as their own fulfillment and thereby become spiritual material for the Devil, if not in this life then in another? We haven't said one word about karma, but my first idea these days is that any attempt to speak of these things makes no sense unless you take into account the peculiar calculus of karma. We may have to recognize that we're not only acting for this life but for other lives. Our past lives and our future lives. Paying dues, receiving awards. Reducing the cost of future dues, for example, by certain acts of abnegation that make no sense to us or our friends, yet ready to dare, on the other hand, sometimes desperate activities because we *are* desperate. The condition in which we live is hurting our karma.

Int: Karma is a word you've used increasingly in the last few years. It's a term that you did not use in "The Metaphysics of the Belly" or "The Political Economy of Time," but which you could have in describing the nature of the soul. Is this something new in your metaphysics or is it a term for something that you've already described, like the way in which the soul exists, in "The Political Economy of Time"?

Mailer: I had come across the word in books but never paid any attention. In about 1953, I think it was in Rockford, Illinois, I went out to visit Jim Jones in his colony and he was talking about karma and I said, "What's all that?" So he gave me the standard explanation which is that we are not only reincarnated, but the way in which we are is the reflection, the judgment, the truth, of how we lived our previous life. If you exist in a simple form of karma with no interference by Gods or Devils, a natural flux of karma, then to the degree you lived a life that was artful, your reincarnation was artful.

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To the degree you lived a life that destroyed the time of others and dredged up all the swamp muds, so you are a creature of the swamp in your next life. The beauty of this may be that there is now good purpose to the swamp. (This isn't Jones's talk any longer, just a more general explanation of karma.) At any rate, Jones went on about it and I said, "You *believe* in that?" Because I was an atheist and a rock rib socialist in those days. He said, "Oh, sure. That's the only thing that makes sense." Well, the line rang in my head for years. "The only thing that makes sense." I thought about it over and over and over and in the last three or four years I began to think, "yes, that does make sense. Jones was right."

Int: Let's move from metaphysics into your views of your work. In *Advertisements for Myself* you stated that you were "imprisoned with a perception which will settle for nothing less than making a revolution in the consciousness of our time." In terms of that ambition to alter the consciousness of our time, how would you evaluate the relative effectiveness of the various forms of your work for that purpose: the novel, the novel-history, the novel-biography, film, politics, the Fifth Estate?

Mailer: I'm not the sort to look back. So long as you keep working it doesn't make much sense to rate your own past performance. None of my work may have influence for all I know. How can you measure it? Some of the ideas I had on how to make movies, for instance, might seem important in 15 or 20 years—maybe they'll make a few movies that way. The ideas I had when Breslin and I were trying to take New York in the mayoralty—some of those ideas have come in. More will. People may yet say, "Oh, those guys—that was an interesting campaign, intellectually speaking." It may even prove a fruitful campaign. Or I might have influence through some of the ideas I had in things nobody ever read. Or if we go off into the most religious and extravagant kind of existentialism, the ideas in "The Metaphysics of the Belly" may have the most future interest to people. I would say one place I have not had influence, up to this point at any rate, is in the novel. Obviously my novels have been conservative in terms of form . . .

Int: Not *Why Are We in Vietnam?*

Mailer: No, *Why Are We in Vietnam?* has nuggets. There are formal ideas buried in *Why Are We in Vietnam?*—I suppose I trusted metaphor in that novel to a degree I've never trusted it before. I worked on the assumption that if I had a metaphor where I might, for example, mix electromagnetism and pine sap in a tree that there was something there. Something scientific yet to be discovered. But I don't know if I'm interested in the question. Where do *you* think my influence will be?

Int: I think it will be in works like *The Armies of the Night*, *Maidstone*, and *Why Are We in Vietnam?* which pushed back the existing limits of genre,

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form, and language, and ultimately, perhaps, it will be your style which will have the most influence. I think that you've abandoned the novel in recent years, even though you still consider the novel the highest form of art, of communication, because you see that it's out of the center of history, and that what you've done since *Armies* is to try to move into the center of history and stay there, to try to impose form on things that are moving so fast and appear so chaotic that you not only are present at the making of history, but you're making it over.

Mailer: Well, certainly in *Armies* I was trying to, I was trying to bring a consciousness to America about the war in Vietnam through personifying one reasonably complicated middle-aged man caught up in the peace movement and not altogether willingly. I think the effect of the book was to make resistance to the war in Vietnam a little more human to people who were still supporting the war. So, yes, I think the book did have a political effect. Maybe it tended to strengthen the side opposed to the war in Vietnam. OK, but, you know, that's not going to mean much in 30 or 40 years.

Int: Not the subject but the form you impose on the subject, the style. That is what I am saying is the significant thing, although you have been criticized of late for this very thing. Critics say that you have an interlocking system of metaphors that you impose on all of your work; that everything you write about now is seen in terms of this metaphysical war of God and Devil for possession of mankind and that instead of allowing your style to arise from your subject you impose your style on the subject.

Mailer: I think that is their profound resentment that I have a philosophy which is coherent, and they don't. I think that is what they hate. If I were a Catholic, if I were Graham Greene, and a devout and somewhat troubled Catholic, and everything I wrote revolved around Catholicism, nobody would argue for a minute. They would say, "He is a Catholic," so why can't they say of me, "He is an existentialist"? I mean, I don't know Graham Greene, but I would like to think it is possible my ideas are as deeply imbedded in me as his faith is in him. Is that wholly inconceivable?

Int: That's a rhetorical question. But doesn't there need to be a dialectic going on between your vision and the subjects to which you attach it, namely the major political events of the 1960s and '70s?

Mailer: But I don't write about everything in politics for just that reason. Not everything appeals to me equally. I spent last summer down in Washington going to the Senate hearings. I thought maybe I would do something for *Atlantic* on Watergate—we had a loose working agreement that I might do something. At the end of the summer I called Bob Manning and said, "I don't know if there's anything I can bring to it that would be mine." You

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see, I don't want to get into situations where I start dominating material, just for the sake of dominating it—which is, of course, what I'm accused of doing. I only move toward material which makes me feel I have something to bring to it. I did this last book on graffiti* because I looked at pictures of subway graffiti Larry Schiller showed me that Jon Naar had taken and thought, "Something is going on there that's interesting." Interesting to me, obviously. So I wanted to write an essay on it and did. But what I'm getting at is I don't think the history of our time is any more apt for me than any other history.

Int: I see what you are doing in light of some lines from "The Political Economy of Time" in which you said, "Form is the record of every intent of the soul or spirit, its desire to reveal the shape, which is to say the mystery of the time it contains in itself." It seems to me that you have a vision and that you perceive certain events of national importance in terms of your vision, choosing the ones that have most significance to you, but writing about them in those terms rather than being the relatively passive observer most other working journalists are.

Mailer: That could be true. But, if so, a price is paid for the philosophy. There's always the loss of a sensuous perception of the event if one is thinking in categories as one perceives the event. That can happen if one has a coherent philosophy. On the other hand, you could say that you end up writing best about those historic events which have a magnetic relation to your own ideas and tend to write less well about situations where that doesn't occur. I think, for example, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* is probably a better book than *St. George and the Godfather*. For a number of reasons including the fact that the conventions themselves were more exciting, but also because there was a polarity in '68 more congenial to me than in '72. Still, I didn't warp it, I didn't go around violating what I saw, did I?

Int: It's not a criticism but an observation: you act upon opposed forces, becoming the opposing force yourself if necessary, in order, it seems to me, to create a synthesis, an altered form, not simply to control these forces but to move us toward that alteration of consciousness we spoke of earlier.

Mailer: Maybe the question is how to verify the observer. What are my passions, prejudices, and particularly my infirmities? It's terribly important who the observer is. That's why I always try to put myself into these works of journalism so the reader can have his sense of me. It's important to be able to decide whether I'm perceiving well or where I'm perceiving badly. Whereas, if I attempt to present to readers what I consider the end product of objective truth, it's likely to be nothing more than the harshly digested conclusions I came up with in my somewhat unbalanced soul. (What else is most journalism?) Whereas I believe the fun in reading comes from

**The Faith of Graffiti*. New York: Praeger, 1974.

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observing the observer. After all I did have that happy streak with *The Armies of The Night*. There was fun in that book, but the fun was to observe the observer. An ideal example of the technique. It doesn't always work that well. Still, there's a lovely remark of Trotsky's I go back to over and over again. He said sometimes the only way you can tell the truth is by a comparison of the lies. If you're listening to two liars telling tales, you may never be able to find out who is lying the most. But you can come closer to a sense of reality by the relations between those mysteries. You see, we may never know, for instance, what the truth of one human is, or another, but we can know a lot about the relations between them. We may be confused by two terribly complicated people but we are able to say with greater certainty, "They hate each other," or "Isn't it extraordinary how they love each other?" because we can feel the relation between the mysteries. So, by the same token, when I write, I try to do that. I try to set up a relation between mysteries where I am that relation as the writing voice.

Int: This is why I think, although you probably won't agree with me, that the kind of work you've been doing outside of the novel per se, which would exclude the novel-history and the novel-biography, is more significant in terms of your own ambitions than the novel.

Mailer: No. Maybe not for the future. You know there was an unhappy newspaper story which had just enough truth to be awful, that I was getting a million dollars for a novel, do you know about that?

Int: The Little, Brown contract?

Mailer: Yes. Well, you know, everybody said, "Isn't that shameful. Ridiculous the way publishers are jacking up the prices." So forth. No one takes into account that Little, Brown is one publishing firm that has been around for many years. The contract is for a novel large in scope. The writing is going to take anywhere from five to seven years and I'm to deliver anything from five to seven hundred thousand words which may end as one novel or can break down to two, three, four, or five novels. We don't know at this point. What Little, Brown is doing, which I think is exceptional and splendid for a publisher to do, is they're giving me a chance to try to write that big book I've been braying about to America for the last fifteen years. And I'm going to find out. I can promise you that I've rarely been as scared in my literary life. Finally I will have no excuse. I'll either be able to do something that's large and good, it should be, you know, given all this hoopla, be halfway as good as *Remembrance of Things Past* if it's going to be any good at all. In other words, we've set the bar high.

Int: I hope it's not as dull as *Remembrance of Things Past*.

Mailer: That isn't too dull a book. I'd settle for it to be as good and as dull. At any rate, I'm so much involved in the problem of writing a novel now that I

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think about it all the time. Coming back to the novel after all these years, the difficulty is as fresh on me now as it was when I started writing. I mean when you get down to it, it is an extraordinary business to say you're going to write a novel. You are creating a world. When you've been writing for as many years as I have, and know the responsibility of being a writer, the Godlike assumption of writing a novel is almost impossible to surmount. How do you open the door? To become the prime cause of your own little world!

Int: I don't think that for you it's just writing a novel. It's writing *the big* novel. Until recently, when I knew that you actually had the novel in progress, I was thinking of the novel that you promised us as a metaphor, and saw what you have been laying before us for the last twenty-five years as a novel. It's art as process rather than a series of products.

Mailer: I think you could take all my work up to now and say, if you want to extend the meaning of a novel, that all this makes up one book or is equal in its impact to one huge novel. I wouldn't run away from that. I would hope it's true. I mean, suppose I get hit by a car tomorrow. Will people come along and say, "Well, he's never written his novel, but he sure did write a novel of sorts." No, I don't argue with that.

Int: I think that you have been staking your reputation on this big book and that you've considered that the work you've been doing since *Armies* is less significant, is easier. "Journalism is chores," you've said, but isn't it really in terms of altering the consciousness of our time more significant than even maybe the big novel might be?

Mailer: It could be, but you can't measure that. You can't also say that the sum of my ambitions is that one sentence, effecting a revolution in the consciousness of our time. You can't measure these things. *Finnegans Wake* has apparently had little influence on the consciousness of our time, but we don't know. Its influences are subterranean. Besides, we don't know what its influence is going to be a hundred years from now.

Int: But it hasn't been widely read.

Mailer: Suppose a hundred years from now people are talking in three or four or five languages at once. The fact that this book *Finnegans Wake* exists is going to be incredible then because it is going to accelerate the consciousness of that time, and yet one man will have done the work a century earlier. Then the book will come into its own. Maybe he forged the first link in something that is going to be tremendously important. The fact that the link is there will serve as a crystallizing force for speaking in tongues. This is an extreme example of what I am trying to say, but we can never be certain of how well we are succeeding in a mission once we've assigned ourselves that mission. All we can ever know is whether we have worked as

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hard as we can.

Int: Some of the forms you've created, like the novel-history and the novel-biography, seem to have more effect on those who are reading and experiencing them than the novel.

Mailer: There's no question that there's more immediate impact.

Int: More widespread, too.

Mailer: It's a fashion, an intellectual fashion for a year or two. Maybe it affects people's minds to a degree and then something comes along which is the opposite of what I've done and changes their minds back. So that, in effect, I'm out there pushing the waves in one direction and other people are pushing the waves in another direction. If you transcend that, if you end up with an absolutely remarkable work which may not have that much impact in the beginning, it's still possible that you will at least have nailed down your points in such a way that people can't keep using the same arguments. I mean, the most disappointing reaction I find in my career is that the criticisms made about me today are so close to the criticisms made ten years ago. It's as if I never reached certain people at all.

Int: Can you be more specific?

Mailer: Oh, well, the attacks on my ego. I mean, you'd think if a man has been carrying on about his ego for ten years that finally they'd say, "All right, he's got an ego and his ego gives me a pain in the ass. But let's see what he's doing." Can you read a review about me these days that doesn't start with those predictable first 150 words about my character, my nature? Did it ever occur to them that I have less nature by now than they do? That I'm just a serious, hardworking, somewhat dumb professional?

Int: There are those to whom you're a living legend.

Mailer: There are days when I say to myself that I have to be the second most unpopular man in America. Richard Nixon is first and I'm second. Who's more unpopular than me, really, leaving good Richard out of this?

Int: You can't ask a midwesterner that.

Mailer: It's true I have no existence in the midwest. Nine out of ten people in the midwest never heard my name. That's certainly true.

Int: That's right, unfortunately. I've been spreading the word but it hasn't reached quite enough of the population. Perhaps you have a less well-defined identity than we imagined; perhaps you have more in common with Marilyn Monroe than Ernest Hemingway, which is why you can view yourself as a literary character and have used so many personae.

Mailer: I think Hemingway also had a gamut of identities. It was just that coming from the midwest, he was considerably more focused in his attempt to build one identity. That is, he didn't try to go from A to Z like Monroe or myself, he kept it pretty much, let's say, between J and K on the one side

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and P and Q on the other. He worked that middle. But I certainly think Hemingway was forging his identity every day of his life, more than myself as a matter of fact. I don't think there's anything so awful about that. It's not comfortable, but I think most artists have this problem. Or let's say at the least, there are two kinds of artists, those who begin without a sense of identity and those who have it from the start. Many young writers right now have a sense of identity. That's the first thing you notice about them, George V. Higgins, Richard Price, any number of good young writers of genre coming up now. James T. Farrell years ago was a perfect example of someone who started with a sense of identity. And then there are the writers who start with other kinds of talents and are always forging their identity.

Int: You've said a number of times that your public personality bears little or no resemblance to your sense of your own identity. Isn't that the sign of a weak rather than a strong ego?

Mailer: That's a midwestern notion, weakness and strength in the ego. Ego, it seems to me, is many things, but the first is the ability to bear various kinds of pain and discomfort in order to carry out your project, whatever that is at a given moment. In other words, ego is the ability to bring oneself into focus for the situation. Now, ego is therefore not the same thing as predictable character at all.

Int: It isn't one's sense of oneself?

Mailer: I'd say rather than a sense of oneself, ego is awareness of one's will. Knowing at a given moment what you want to do. At least the kind of ego I'm talking about is that. I once said at the beginning of the piece on the first Ali-Frazier fight that ego is the ability to move with certainty into matters about which we know very little. Now, if you accept that, there's no reason to assume that you have to have a sense of self. What you need is a sense of your will. Monroe had a huge ego considering how void she felt of identity.

Int: To return to your new novel for a moment, if you can write it as you now conceive of it will you consider it your greatest achievement?

Mailer: Well, I'm at the beginning of it and nothing's more dangerous than to talk about what I think it's going to be. Still, it wouldn't be much fun to write an enormously long book that isn't very good, that just is fairly readable and slightly less good than the other stuff I've done. Of course, says the practical voice, the publisher might do better with that than if I do something really good. But if I can bring it off roughly the way I conceive of it, I think I'll have something pretty good, pretty interesting. Then after that—I don't look beyond. There might be all sorts of things to do. I'm going to be a lot older. The shock right now is that I probably know what I'm going to be doing next year. In previous years I never did. That was fun,

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not to know what one's future was.

Int: Isn't the plot of time that Little, Brown has bought you what you've been looking for so that you don't have to do two or three months' work and get a big chunk of money so that you can get back to the novel?

Mailer: That's what I wanted the contract for. I kept making these big chunks of money for quick books, but they would take enough out of me so that I didn't gain time. I kept thinking I might, but never did. Now I can work at a steadier rate, and less on a collision course. The question is, however, have I kept enough of myself intact to do this book? We're going to find out. That's existential.

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STORIES

Raymond Federman

CYRANO OF THE REGIMENT

The 82nd AIRBORNE DIVISION it can go fly a kite! That's what I kept telling myself. But nonetheless I was a member of that tough gutsy glorious spitshined outfit, and like it or not (LADIES & GENTLEMEN!) I have 27 jumps behind me!

27 parachute jumps! That's something Isn't it? A bit scared at first but it's normal in the beginning.

You get used to it!

You hang on in spite of the pain

the fear

and the butterflies §§§§§§§§§§§§§ But then there is the training.

Ah! what tremendous training! What preparation! Just in case. The thousands and thousands of PUSH UPS ass stiff like a trampoline UP & DOWN give me 15 give me 20 give me 30 on the double But now I had it—above and beyond the head—I had it (up to here).

And yet it was not that bad (after all) if one considers if one reflects a bit on all the advantages all the privileges of this kind of E

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on all the advantages of this careless kind of EXISTENCE

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where others think for you / where others decide for you / where others / in fact / protect you / (and let us be fair and not forget to mention the free board & room & the free uniforms—summer and winter uniforms), and so I took advantage of all those advantages but especially (*I hardly dare admit it*) I took advantage of my education: I wrote love letters—love letters for all the guys in my barrack [Company C—Third Platoon] Yes, I wrote love letters for all the jerks in my barrack who couldn't do it all by themselves Love letters to all the guys' little broads in all the corners of America Love letters for all the ignorants all the hillbillies in my outfit to all the little hicktowns of Texas Kentucky Alabama Tennessee Arkansas Mississippi and even as far north as Ohio (which in those days I pronounced OYO—question of background—because of the difficulty the lack of experience too I had with the H in the middle) In fact I even had to write some letters as far away as Alaska.

Five bucks a letter! That was my price (Take it or Leave it) and no one bitched about it. Therefore—WOW! would I bang that loving stuff away (in those days I had an old beat up portable Olivetti)! Fabulous dreams Vows of all types Endless unbreakable promises Sweet and languishing memories Weeping descriptions of nature Wild erotic images and situations And even dirty little doodles with color pencils in the corners of the writing paper which the guys would of course furnish me with the envelopes and the stamps (Air Mail). Ah! what ORGIES I invented on the spot what ROMANTICISM I created sitting there on the floor writing on my footlocker!

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some of them would cheat of course (behind my back). They couldn't wait those bastards to read how much their little broads adored them. But, those guys (the cheaters) who were caught opening a letter before me—four of five guys were my spies—they had to pay a fine. The next letter would cost them a dollar more. That would indeed teach them a lesson!

WOW! did I have fun writing those letters Full speed
with two fingers on the typewriter and without the
least apprehension
without thinking much about what I wrote In
those days form and content didn't mean much to me I simply
accumulated words
I simply piled up the words in any old way
Up and Down
and Sideways
metaphors
upon metaphors
contradictions
on top of contradictions
I exaggerated full blast
I played with words
with double meaning and
triple meaning and
without any respect (I must confess) for
grammar style
spelling logic
disposition punctuation
it was just a matter of filling up space
PAGES
&
PAGES
approximately a buck a page I kept telling
myself
And so! When I ran out of stuff to say
I would simply copy borrow steal
plagiarize all

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over
the place
I would simply open
a book
any book!
(usually romantic novels
or classical tragedies)
and copy whole passages *verbatim et litteratim*
throwing in a few foreign words here and there
(usually French words)
those guys didn't know the difference
that's for sure and the more I gave them the more they loved
IT
Ah
What creativity What spirit of creativity I was
in in those days
What inspirations
banging every night on my old beat up
OLIVETTI
(with two fingers)
sometimes telling one broad what I was supposed to say
to another one
sometimes even getting the letters confused
the names all mixed up
sometimes sending a letter that was supposed to go to a girl in
Nebraska
to a girl in
Arkansas
But who cared
who gave a shit
it kept going (full blast) and they all loved me for it both
the guys in my outfit
and the girls in all the little hicktowns of
AMERICA

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HERE IN FACT LET ME GIVE YOU AN EXAMPLE (AMONG MANY) OF THE TYPE OF LOVE LETTERS I WROTE IN THOSE DAYS—OF COURSE I'M ONLY QUOTING THE GOOD SEXY PASSAGES—AND I'M SOMEWHAT CORRECTING EDITING EXPURGATING CENSURING (IF I MAY) THE KIND OF ENGLISH I USED IN THOSE DAYS—PURIFYING (IN A SENSE) THE KIND OF LANGUAGE I WROTE IN THOSE DAYS—IMPROVING SOMEWHAT THE TONE STYLE GRAMMAR SYNTAX—THE PRESENTATION ALSO—AND OF COURSE—THIS GOES WITH OUT SAYING—CORRECTING THE ABOMINABLE PRONUNCI ATION I HAD THEN (AND STILL QUITE IMPERFECT) WITHOUT HOWEVER ATTEMPTING TO DEFORM THE ORIGINAL

Fort Bragg, Fayetteville, N.C.
(Let us say), January 15, 1951

My Darling, My Treasure, My Lovely Adorable
*Juicy Peach, My Dear M******,*

You cannot imagine how much I thought of you, last night, under my lonely knaki blankets, alone, in my narrow military bed, surrounded by the heavy oppressive solitude of life in the army. I felt, in me, through my flesh torn by the pain of your absence, a suffering of indefinable nature. The inner emptiness of my soul rang with shrieks and groans: it was as though needles and knives of fire were piercing my body.

Unable to endure this atrocious suffering, I took my private member in my hands, and feeling it palpitating savagely like a lost animal, no a giant fruit rather, an enormous banana which was pulsating there outside my own body, I began to shake it, to handle it, to squeeze it with all the furor of my desire, and suddenly I felt flowing, full blast, Woosh! a delicious juice that I wanted to transmit immediately to your essential organs. Ah! my dearest reservoir, how much I wanted to feel, at that moment, the wild sugars of my fruit flow in you like a torrent. How I wanted to hear them burst inside of you like a gun, like a cannon (a 75 milimeters), no, like a volcano, in the deepest parts of you, in your most secret, tender, wild and unexplored regions.

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Ah! if only you knew, my golden treasure, how much I missed you, how much we missed each other, last night, when, alone, naked and vibrant under my military blankets, at the most solitary moment of night in North Carolina my eyes closed, I saw the image of your sweet and soft body sneak next to mine inside my bed. Ah! dear feathery chicken, adorable pitless peach of tender flesh, smooth and rosy body of such lovely round contours, velvety like a mushroom without tail, little sugared snail, landscape of my inner dreams, if I could only make you feel, YES, how much I wanted (last night but also every night) to penetrate you, with what endless passion, what a huge desire I wanted to rush towards you beyond the mountains, beyond the valleys, beyond the rivers and the canals from under my khaki blankets of loneliness, then you would have known the dimensions of my love, depth of my pool of pleasure, despair of my trembling hands, sources of my loneliness and frustration. I see in my dreams your voluptuous and greedy hips and your adventurous thighs, hardly ripe, avidly opened to receive, there in that moist furry meadow of yours, the harvest of my nocturnal cultivation.

Ah! do I worry, do I worry to know that you are alone so far away in your little Missouri hicktown. But . . . are you ALONE? Here comes doubt in my head. I fear the thought that, perhaps, at this very moment, some son of a bitch of another guy (AH! do I tremble) is holding you in his tottering SKINNY arms, while my MUSCULAR arms, my PARATROOPER arms, my arms splendily fortified by thousands and thousands of push ups cannot hold you, and squeeze you tight to make you feel, despite the distance, with what madly power, what furor, what energy, what vitality I would like to grab those lovely contours of yours and squeeze them out of their last drop of love!

Here life is sad without you. But otherwise everything is fine—except for the disgusting grub. If you have a bit of money saved, could you (my darling) be nice to me and send me a billet doux *(dig it?). I adore you! Madly and passionately with my soul and body. Give your dear mother (but not your father) a BIG kiss for me.*

Your BIG and SAD Carrot, J * * K* * * * * **

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LET ME GIVE YOU NOW (BRIEFLY) AN EXAMPLE OF THE RESPONSES MY LOVE LETTERS WOULD OCCASION—IT IS I THINK A RATHER GOOD AND TYPICAL EXAMPLE—BUT OF COURSE (I NEED NOT EMPHASIZE) THE BROADS DIDN'T HAVE MUCH IMAGINATION NOR A GREAT DEAL OF TALENT FOR THOSE SORTS OF THINGS—NONETHELESS (LET US BE FAIR) THEY WOULD PUT ALL THEIR HEARTS INTO IT AND MAKE VALIANT EFFORTS TO COME UP WITH DECENT REPLIES—NO DOUBT I INSPIRED THEM A BIT BECAUSE FROM TIME TO TIME WE WOULD GET SOME RATHER FANTASTICAL LY HILARIOUS REPLIES—I COULDN'T BELIEVE SOME OF THEM—ENOUGH TO DRIVE YOU WILD—BUT WHAT STYLE WOW WHAT GRAMMAR—WHAT ATROCIOUS ORTHO GRAPHY—INCREDIBLE—MOST OF THAT STUFF PURE HILL BILLY JARGON—OBVIOUSLY THESE LITTLE FARM GIRLS WERE ILLITERATE (LIKE THEIR BOY FRIENDS IN FACT) AND COULD HARDLY READ OR WRITE OR JUST ENOUGH TO SCRIBBLE THEIR REPLIES—THEREFORE ONCE MORE WE ARE FORCED TO CORRECT SOMEWHAT (HERE AND THERE) IN ORDER TO RENDER THEIR REPLIES (OR AT LEAST THE ONE EXAMPLE WE ARE NOW PRESENTING)* A BIT MORE READ ABLE MORE COMPREHENSIBLE MORE ACCEPTABLE—BUT (PLEASE) DO NOT IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT THAT WE ARE INVENTING THIS REPLY—ABSOLUTELY NOT—THIS IS AN ORIGINAL A GENUINE VERSION AS WRITTEN BY ONE OF THE GIRLS AND AS IT CAME TO US—ONE FINE DAY—IN A PINK PERFUMED ENVELOPE—VIA AIR MAIL & SPECIAL DELIVERY!

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* This example is chosen at random among a stock of more than two hundred

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Kirksville, Missouri
(Approximately)
January 23, 1951

My BIG Dear Turnip, My SAD Muscular Paratrooper,
*My Lonely Prune, Dear J***,*

I reread your last letter at least two hundred times since it came and it is with tears in my eyes, dearly adored carrot, that I'm writing you today, for me too I feel inside of me, in my most secret regions, as you say so well my sugared one, in my most private parts, that immense void which you ALONE can fill so well! Yesterday, me too, nude and trembling under my soft warm pink blankets, I felt those huge needles and knives of your absence (Oh delicious heavy artillery of yours!) softly penetrate my inner landscape devastated by the sadness and boredom of civilian life in Missouri where nothing—NOTHING (I swear to you) ever happens, ever comes to fulfill me, to replenish me, to sweeten me with the sugars of love.

My legs timidly spread apart, my eyes tightly closed, my breasts raised shyly and lovingly towards you, out there in the direction of North Carolina in a pleading manner, I suddenly imagined you had returned to lie next to me in my empty couch. Your solid and vigorous hands were voyaging all over my body, circulating back and forth over my palpitating flesh, rediscovering, all at once, the boundaries of your property which, I swear to you on my beloved mother's cherished soul, has not been touched by anyone else but you—brave paratrooper—since you departed so heroically more than six months ago. As my hands, shivering with desire, followed the traces of yours along the contours of my body (I am using your lovely words), a strict, severe monotonous voice, deep down inside of me, kept whispering that I should not do those unspeakable gestures, not let myself be tempted by those movements of weakness and despair, that I should not harvest in the darkness of my solitude, especially without the proper tools, the golden wheat that belongs to you. This deep voice, no doubt the voice of reason, of religion, of morality, of Law & Order, grew louder and louder as I pursued (in my mind only) the image (that magnificent image) of your giant fruit, your sweet banana, enormous, nervous and probing, as it wriggled deep inside of me in search of love. But, it is

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finally with empty hands, empty and humid hands, ALAS, that I came back BACK to myself, alone, weeping of sadness in my lonely bed, still knowing how you must want me, out there, far away, beyond the meadows, beyond the plains and the deserts, beyond the dark clouds, beyond the highways and the throughways and the superhighways. Oh! my darling prune, How I love to hear those juicy words you speak so tenderly, that rich and poetic vocabulary you know how to dispatch so well in my direction with such a wave of eloquence.

Ah! my dearest ferocious monkey how well you know how to climb the trees and branches of our love to hurl yourself (like TARZAN) into the voluptuous jungle of our desires. My precious apricot do not doubt of me, do not worry. I am yours, do not be jealous, for I am yours alone, for ever and evermore! I am of those who remain faithful until death does us part in the flesh and in the soul! I am waiting for you, you are there in my skin, bones, nerves and organs like some Deity whom I sacralize, whom I divinize! COME BACK oh COME BACK to me. I can't stand it any more.

My mother tells me that I am crazy to love you so much, crazy to adore a man like you because you are not worth it, because you are a GOOD-FOR-NOTHING, a miserable, lazy creature, but me I know, yes I know that it is not true, and I am convinced that you are GOOD-FOR-SOMETHING, and that it is not your damn fault if you are the way you are. Me, I know that you are good, real, beautiful, gorgeous, enormous, vibrant like a stallion. So, I beg of you, brave adorable paratrooper, continue to do your PUSH UPS solidly, regularly, stubbornly, despite that mean sergeant, everyday, so that when you come back (to me) you will be strong and ready to crush me in your fortified arms!

Here the weather is bad. Rains all the time. It's sad and lonely. Everybody is sad, unfriendly. I spend my time watching television, or playing my record player. Yes, the days, the weeks, the months pass so slowly here, in my solitude. If I can manage to save a little cash (without my dear Mom noticing it) from the money she gives me to do the shopping, I'll send you AIR MAIL & SPECIAL DELIVERY a TEN dollar bill for the Anniversary (I do hope you remember!) of our first

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encounter at the State Fair as we watched with pride the black Angus parade in the corral, and of our first passionate and secret embraces in the back seat of your new Chevrolet. Good Bye! dearest love, my brutal and manly paratrooper. I send you thousand French kisses xxxxxxxxx!

*Your BIG Juicy Apple, SAD and Desperate Without you But Faithful and Devoted, Your One and Only Peachy M********

= =

§§§

Stuart Mitchner

INDIAN ACTION

The dying man's imaginary food keeps catching in his throat, every swallow grinding the hot skull into my thigh, wetting me with his fever while I think how I would film the scene in a movie, no, a cartoon of India the cow, swallowing everything she laps up with her black tongue, the little wooden decomposing train of cars the color of dried blood funneled through the passages and alleys of her system. All the time we hold onto our seats, telling ourselves it's only a night ride between Agra and Benares, nobody's dying, and nobody's eating us. To survive India, stop trying to assimilate it; let it assimilate you. The man saucing me with his sweat knows; his eyes strain to say it, "I'm being eaten!" His head rolls in the lap of the big red-robed woman taking him to Benares to die. He can't see us, can't see the window or the hot coals Ray calls tiger's eyes flashing and dissolving in the acid of the night. His gaze is fixed on the fat spider bustling in the empty complexity of its web, up by the ceiling where the caged bulb sways and fades. Maybe he sees a fantasy of Benares in the web's luminous streets, the spider-river waiting to drink his ashes after they burn him. When we get off to change trains, I can still feel his sweat on my leg, like a cold touch in the four-in-the-morning Ganges mist.

India drops a hush and a bomb in the same breath. Sometimes the bomb comes as a relief, because the intensity of the hush has you listening seriously to the voices in your blood. We were in that state of quiet, eating fly-specked cupcakes and sipping tea, nervously aware of the hundreds of pilgrims camped in the chill of the platform, one mass breath rising above them in a haggard cloud suddenly gutted by violent mushroomings of steam delivered of the thing we all wanted, the train, the bomb, fallen upon us without warning, a hole opening in the sky, all noise on the other side of it. Everything explodes at once, smokestack, wheels, lights, astonished eyes, the engineer's teeth, no two things in the same frame, nothing in scale, rushing crowd and

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steaming machinery blown to a shipwreck litter of boxes, bundles, and lumpy bedrolls spilling pots of rice, collisions multiplying over our heads, nothing to do but go with the undertow. My friend Ray (a face like Shakespeare's in the portrait, the golden earringed Spanish buccaneer) vanishes into the second blast of steam.

I woke up in an empty car, the train moving, the mouth of the hush around me again. Not that I'd been asleep, only semiconscious, catapulted from the exploding platform to this barren sanctuary no one but an American in a delirium of panic would dare to enter without a first-class ticket. Trying to put myself in touch with myself again, I blew the grit off the lenses of my glasses, fingered the spot on the leg of my pants (still wet), and plucked my beard until it showered pink icing flakes and yellow crumbs of interrupted pastry mixed with cinders and ashes from all the wind and fire of the train's arrival. A jolt, a collision, and I was slammed to the floor still fixed on the image of myself exploring that little pocket of calm. Another kick from the old cow, another split-second hush, another bomb of sound, jackals howling over a nightmare of bagpipes—this must be it, the juggernaut, the ball of fire. But the roof should have caved in by now. I looked out the window. They were all there in the darkness, roaring confusion, nothing visible but a black stew of forms, no faces, no station, no lights except for fires at the horizon where a gleam was unevenly defining the presence of the river.

For some reason, everyone had abandoned the train. I was sure nobody was aboard but me and, possibly, hopefully, Ray. I shouted his name and immediately ducked back from the square of light exposing me to a suspicious multitude as silent now as it was invisible. I thought my shout had silenced them. I waited for some boomerang of response, my Saturday matinee brain flashing jungles, serpents and cannibal acrobats. Nothing. Even the silence seemed to recede. I returned to the window and called Ray again. My voice came back at me. They were all gone, noiselessly transported, all but one.

He flies at me in fragments, first a gleam breaking quick as a lizard's tongue from the slit of white light on the horizon, coming with a sound of regurgitation, the ragged morning gargle of India dredging the gutters of the body, while I wait behind the bars at the window, paralyzed in brightness, like a prowler caught by a searchlight. One blue-violet hand, half a hand, reaches up, skin flaking like ash,

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finger-stubs freshly spiced with blood under fluttering tatters of black tape—leprosy—closely followed by the other, uninfected hand opening and closing in mockery of speech—money, alms—the face rising with it, the mouth prissy, distorted with nagging, "*Baksheesh, sahib,* ah *sahib*. . . ," one eye gone, the crater I sidestep only to slip in the mouth, open around a dagger tongue bloody with betel juice, broken teeth jumbled like the back alley shambles of Indian cities, the body floating below, ultraviolet debris, nothing complete, no lines without lesions, the X-ray contortionist Mr. Bones jigging out of focus as focus snaps back to the red glaze filming the other eye, the pupil drowning like a demon in the bloodtide, not really drowning but faking it, tuned to the cues of the master strategist grinning behind the retina as his beams pull me out of my frame; sucked in, fascinated, infected; what a striptease, what finesse, stopping time, diddling the G-string trigger of a gun that never goes off; feed the hand or sink in the eye.

Around noon, I was on another train, the right one this time, booming over the Ganges, trying to unstick the pikes and turrets of Benares from the clotted webbing of the bridge, my vision, for the first time in hours, returning to normal. The wad of Indian money I had was gone, and my left leg was so sore I wondered if the dying man had bitten me. A bear still roared in my ears, but I felt clear enough to know I'd invented the bear to describe a cry from the leper hanging with his one good hand from the bars of the window as the train shuddered into motion, pulling free of the bloody eye, Mr. Bones following under the window, mewing brokenheartedly until I threw him the purple rupee notes, each with a shiver of remorse, bribing him, choking him with currency, the man of gleams running after, one quick hand catching notes out of the rising wind, crooning like a lover primed with a feast of sweet purple kisses.

I was in focus, but not Benares. The towers were crooked, the angles confused. No amount of staring could straighten it out. Flames from the riverfront pyres licked at the threadbare outlines of a Medieval city in a tapestry: witch-hat towers of gingerbread, hidden windows, visored helmets, owls staring from every nook, fires burning low on steep terraces, the smoke rising over the river like an image of heavenly ascension as the mills of the holy city purify the morning's dead. If it was a tapestry, then moths had eaten it full of holes that

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flocks of doves were flying through, the stained fabric disintegrating, the bottom half on fire.

I found Ray in the dormitory of the Tourist Bungalow. He was sleeping when I staggered in, my dead-body's-weight of a pack on my back, shoulders knotted and brain burning after a mile-long trek across one of the littered wounds India opens in the earth; sun and vultures overhead, last night's face forming around the sockets of black slime surrounding the road, the dream began before I fell asleep: the half-digested profile approaching, two ash-soft hands brushing my neck as the leper pulls me down for a kiss, blood pouring from his mouth into mine, flowing thick as honey, filling me with warm light.

Ray woke me up, using his south-of-the-border bunkhouse accent ("Rise 'n shine, Rio, time we did some whoopin' 'n hollerin' in this burg"), and we started the long walk to the river. The light of the last hour of afternoon had mellowed the landscape and pools of amber were brimming in the sockets, the eyes of a face in ecstasy where the other had been. Ray was riding the high swing of his style, plunging into India with his Pacific Ocean surfer stride, wagging his big mustaches like antennae, blue electricity in his eyes, rolling his head, swaying his shoulders, eating the air with the passion of a genius of cunnilingus, fathoming all the slants, ruts, knots and more insidious perversities of the Indian earth that always had me stumbling in a constant struggle for balance. Ray knew the art of motion, turns and steps edged with nuance, the enlightened dancer—arch the back like a statement of truth, curl the hand and play the fingers on the air—every move and every moment rich with style.

Ray had also mastered the acrobatics of outrage. There came a time, in every Indian day, when it was necessary to relieve the pressure by kicking a hole in the atmosphere to shout through. If the hole was big enough, you could even dance in it, as Ray did now, in mid-air, spinning around, off the kick, a Nijinsky leap, dust flying in the faces of our enemies—a flock of cycle rickshaw drivers running us down with their mongrel hackney-bicycles and nagging monotonously for our trade, "*Sahib, sahib,* city-going, *sahib, eck rupiya, sahib!*" Ray fired from the hip, kissing off each shot with bits from the Western movies we acted out all over India ("Eat dust, you scum-suckin' pig!"), the rickshaws backing off in immediate, amazed retreat, all but the one

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who was waiting when the dust cleared, leaning over his handlebars, smiling through us as if he'd seen our little movie before. He had the absolute, indifferent power of rickshaw illumination, ready to pedal you upside-down to Tierra del Fuego or any of the other cosmic water-holes hidden in the "O" he was forming with his fingers. "River going?" His tone implied that the only road to the river passed through that "O." Quoting the price, he was like a bored aristocrat offering a fortune to street singers, for one song. He displayed his rickshaw as a work of art, pointing out the cozy interior, the Victorian upholstery, the fluted canopy, and, with lingering fingers, the painting of the Ganges and the gold towers of Benares on the rear of the carriage. We climbed in, and he pedaled off, singing to himself, laughing, too.

Nooked in black plush, not like a coffin or a gondola, but a jaunty black, for an erotic rendezvous on the Santa Fe trail, so it feels, we move along, lulled over the ruts in a cradle rhythm, around sudden elephants, relaxing in rickshaw fog, squeezed to a balance of hips and shoulders, feeling every gritty wrinkle of the road, the train of images broken and mended in the rolling momentum, oily motor debris, fans and fly-wheels reassimilated into the horned shadows of bullocks pulling wagons, the horns looping innertubes, the loops cropping angles, all junk smoothly digested by motion, eye and wheel in symmetry, no loose ends, even as the lines of motion multiply approaching city center, objects flowing in from all sides, shanties, bicycles, tins, signboards, latticed shutters, each striking off the next into the next, bewitching us with the magic shadow theater of the wheels until we pour into a great drain of a square whirling with rickshaws, bullock carts, tongas, horses, jitneys, comicstrip jalopies and hundreds of bicycles ringing adolescent music with every pressing of bells.

Any minute now Donald Duck might round the corner in his canary-yellow coupe while the open-mouthed face of my childhood watches us overflowing the bright frame, Pluto, Mickey, Charlie Chan, the Green Hornet, Gabby Hayes, Kilroy, the Shadow, the monocled Peanut man, the whole crowd, the drifters, the Gunga Dins, the pith-helmeted jungle troopers, the seersucker-suited traders and conspirators, the Sydney Greenstreets and Peter Lorres of the grade Z, washed-up zombies and wolfmen on the last cure, seedy spies in

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decaying trench coats and flea-bitten Fedoras, smoking Fatimas and watching the action on Easy Street from the sagging dashboard-ashtray balconies of the Hotel Bijou, which has a Piper Cub on its roof, with a monkey in the cockpit.

The bastard Hindu English of the signs speaks to the gibberish of objects rollicking around the intersection, wagons teeming with junk, a burned-out typewriter keyboard hanging in the broken wings of an umbrella, an English horn stuffed with newspaper, a pedal-style sewing machine, an old Victrola, nothing new, complete or unpatched, much of the scrap inherited from England like the scraps of English childishly printed on signs, a pair of deformed spectacles (''Eyes Fixed'') casting nervous sideways looks at the Cheshire Cat smile of dentures (''Painless Tooth Extracted''), a painted finger pointing under carefree letters, ''This Way for Private Sexual Diseases,'' or better, the blurb on the Indian edition of *Northanger Abbey* crammed into my back pocket, ''Cunning! Compassioned! Strangely touchy!'' English, logic, geometry—the old cow India chews it all up and shits a masterpiece of happy nonsense more in harmony with us and more beautiful than the full-moon Taj Mahal we saw two nights ago. Meanwhile, smiling at everything, we play out the vaudeville of the rickshaw fare dispute, Mutt and Jeff haggling with the organ-grinder on a Turn-of-the-Century stage, the happy city backdrop behind us, eye-windows winking, a cat on the fence and the man in the moon. We leave him singing his curses as we highstep it through the wild west rambledown burlesque and swing-door saloon tonsorial parlor porches of cow town in the magic hour, looking for the river.

Mutilation Alley hits us like a slaughterhouse in the middle of a feast, the taste of slime filming the air, coming with a spoiled-meat smell carried by the smoke from the pyres. In India you strut from honkytonk into the gauntlet of atrocities before you can think to stop smiling. They line the approach to the river, mauled, chewed bloody, stumps raised, prodding for alms, hectic faces crying long rag tongues, mouths to stuff, any scrap or coin, any token of disgust, scratching with their voices to break the skin and open sores in our ears, to swallow our averted wholeness in the hot contagion they blow into the air with every breath. We plunge ahead with half-shut eyes as if it were raining acid, each drop burning a passage through us. Everything I see has the

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glistening moistness of a fresh cut.

We land shaken but upright, the wind of the tunnel that coughed us out still whistling in our ears. We have to brake fast to keep from skidding off the edge of the flat city Benares seems to be until you suddenly pop through a hole to find yourself staring straight down a steep dream of wide descending ledges, the brown river at the bottom, flowing with the hushed, softly hissing motion of a silent film. There it is, the Indian hush manifested in a river, the other shore lapped in a dusk that drifts, rises and settles like the brew of the water.

Ray has his nose in the air, one hand up, fingering the atmosphere thoughtfully, as though it were textured with messages. "Hey—," taking a great long head-rolling snort of air, "—that's it!"

"What?"

"Sperm. It's the same smell." Ray signs his diagnosis with a Shakespearean flourish, arms out, palms up, wizard sleeves gaping around his wrists.

A croak from the river answered him—"*Sahib! Sahib!*"—the voice contracting scale, bluffs and ledges collapsing with imaginary miles of space. "*Ey, sahib!*" We were closer to the water than we realized, but not close enough yet to see whoever was calling. The voice awakened us to other sounds, chanted prayers, gaggings and spittings, and the disjointed tootings and drummings of musicians hidden somewhere behind the dark hooded cliff-faces of the temples looking over our shoulders. Nothing we heard had a visible source. I imagined eyes in tower galleries studying every unsteady step of our descent. Something moved in the haze down by the water. "*Eck rupiya, sahib!*" Humpbacked, beckoning and buzzing, he danced in and out of wet shadows, flirtatiously, teasing perception. "All the river, *sahib!*" He came to meet us, hunched but not humpbacked, rubbing his hands like Mosca rubbing his feelers, fierce with calculations. "You see everything, *sahib!* the burning, *sahib!*"

We edged into the static of his radius like country boys hooked on the shimmy of the skin show barker's index finger. He jabbed at the river with both hands, his broken leer implying that when he lifted the curtain of haze we would see a floating, three-ring Kama Sutra circus that would finally consume our most passionate fantasies. "*All,* you see *all* the river!" He generated irresistible frictions, the secret of his technique cooking in the quick hot friction of his hands, which he

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stopped rubbing only to show how swiftly he could row us out of there. His price was too fair. He seemed suspiciously anxious to get us in his boat and have us believe that we could evacuate the disintegrating city only by putting ourselves under the wings of his oars. The tiers of ledges behind us were convincingly deserted except for one pallid, emaciated cow eating what looked to be nothing but a dribble of gloom. Night spread like visible decay, breaking the edges of the steps into a black powder, cracks opening between the terraces, walls and temple-faces crumbling in a landslide of shadow, everything truncated, pitted, distorted, half the cow gone already, as if it had been eating itself. The boatman had to guide us down through the smoky air at the water's edge. We could barely see the ragged prow. Mosca buzzed at our backs, chafing us to leap the black space of water. Ray made it, but I landed off-balance, nearly capsizing us. The boatman scolded, which made me feel I'd botched an initiation, risking the anger of the river.

I believed it. India plagues the mind with vivid dramas of guilt, every step a possible desecration of something, every callous thought or averted look a violation that might have to be redeemed. The transgression could have been my behavior on the train or my revulsion as we shivered through the teeth of the gauntlet. As soon as I made the jump I felt it was a test which would be judged, and the idea had thrown me into a panic, that and the impact of the air, stuck to my face like the rigging of a web. While he rowed us into the darkest spaces of the river, I was picking bits of the stuff from my face, some of it fine as down, but slippery to touch. The night was swarming with vague particles, pieces of the shore, which seemed to be diffusing itself, the few last scraps curling like paper in a fire, temples consumed, imploded, sucked back into their own hollows. The soft things in the air, the moth-smooth grains that brushed my face as they drifted, must be ashes.

Every stroke of the oars scattered Benares behind us like a trail of dissolving embers. Within a minute I had lost sense of our relation to the shore. The boatman probed as much as he rowed, treating the river as a being whose complex desires could be satisfied only by the tips of these particular oars. He faced us, buzzing, humming to himself, distorting his mouth, stirring up a suction of noises and images so

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unnerving it made me flinch from the touch of Ray's shoulder as if we were enemies. We both jumped at his sudden cry. One dripping oar pointed out a large object floating past, shrouded in a greenish phosphorescence. "Finish!" The boatman nearly lost the oar as he pantomimed a slashed throat, leering, hissing, "Food!" until we looked closely enough to see the bird perched on the bloated corpse, feeding. The boatman made furious bobbing pecking motions with his head, prodding us for some show of civilized shock or at least an answering leer to thank him for this exotic picture. His gestures promised the river would show us more if we studied it carefully. Ray obligingly stuck his hand in. "Feel it," he told me. "It's like gravy!" Touching water, mouthed, my hand sank in the blood-film of the face crooning at the train window.

I must have faded out. The first time I thought I opened my eyes we were plunging at impossible speed toward two cavities of fire. Ray grabbed me out of the middle of a fall, cold music in my ears. "You were on your way overboard, one foot in the air—." But the boatman was calling, "Look, *sahib*. . . ," turning us on the point of one oar, the other arching out, like a compass defining a circle, the circle on fire, waves of blast-furnace heat hitting us through the creamy ooze of smoke which left its scum hardening on my face like hot tallow.

Egged on by Mosca, we looked past looking, hungry to catch and contain every spasm of action on the stage of fires—pariah dogs scrambling for stray scraps from the burning bodies; packs of children in a fever, faces overflowing reflections, pin-wheels, flashes, shadows on the move, dancing incarnations of the rhythms drone-drummed by a kindergarten Bolero band; the technicians of the spectacle glorying in the light of their conflagrations, fanning flames with tattered shirttails and prodding corpses into embers as they shout down the families of the dead over the cost of kindling, always with one miser's eye on the gold of the fires. The tallest one wore the remains of an American-style sport shirt. We were close enough to see his smallpox scars and every frayed thread in the rag-bandanna wrapped around his brow.

Our guide made disparaging gestures at the two blazes in progress, asking us to concentrate instead on the pyre which had not yet been put to the torch. There we would see the sensation he had promised. As if moving at his direction, the tall one looked suddenly

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our way and walked toward us. I flinched from his approach like a spy caught in the act, but he was heading for three shrouded corpses propped like mummies on the edge of the shore, the lower parts tongued by the ripples of water our boat was stirring. "The *red, sahib!*" cried Mosca. "Watch the red!" The two corpses in white shrouds had been streamlined of sexual identity, but not the red one being hauled fully onto the shore. "Red for the *woman, sahib!*" He ogled the corpse. "Look, you can see her!" We could, and as soon as we did, we were caught. She was his pride and joy, the erotic treat his Times Square smut-hustler's tone had been promising us from the moment he made his pitch. Rather than hiding the rounded, ripely-defined ins and outs of her shape, the shimmering red muslin hugged every curve, so alive to the frantic reflections of other fires that she seemed to shudder in voluptuous response when the tall figure leaned close to rip away the shroud, unmasking a well-fed siren's face with the death-mouth shock a pit between two plump slippery cheeks.

The boatman was happy to watch me watch, nourishing himself on the melodrama of my reactions as my eyes rushed from the trap of the face to the naked seamless wholeness of the body beneath the last, almost transparent, layer of wrapping. But she was carried to the pyre, forced down into the nest of twisted wood, fragmented before I had her in focus; the form broken, eyes on the forehead, mouth a hole in the wood, a suspicion of horse teeth jutting through, one dislocated breast, one bony insult of a backwards foot the attendant grabbed and turned like a key in a lock when she began to slide out of place. The slapstick foot kicked me out of my cloud. I wanted to see her burn. I wanted to feast my eyes on each exotic detail, each act in the comedy of abominations, the stag-movie orgy, the voyeur's dream, my throat dry, breath held, mind and sight fixed on the master of fires descending upon her, probing suggestively with the blazing torch as if he might complete the humiliation by shoving it between her legs. Obscene chirpings from the boatman insidiously condition every thought a minute before the torch swoops to diagram the fire's passage, setting it in motion everywhere at once with the delicate rapidity of a baton conducting music; but this isn't music, not this pandemonium of banshees, whistles, Bronx cheers, chugging engines, and a pig on the rampage, uprooting a sun-train on its way from the Himalayas to the heart of the Ganges delta, all the tiger mouths of the

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fire feeding through its contracting windows, each window beaming clarity enough to pull my eyes out of my head, the schoolboy left behind at the keyhole holding himself against the wind of the fire with both hands. The black pig is being eaten by the clear-light tiger, but now that I'm inside the tiger, none of these words or images matter, no distractions, no separations, everything assimilated and refined in one diamond-point of warm light. The corpse's last explosion blows me back into the boat as something soars from the trough of fire, dissolving in a rain of brightness over our heads, the boatman recoiling, clearly visible for the first time, not the frictional entrepreneur I imagined, but a feverish little man rowing us against the flower-and-shroud-choked current, moving the oars as stiffly as crutches.

He completely ignored us until we were out of his boat and it was time to pay. We still felt too stunned to argue when he asked for more than the price first quoted. He had chosen to deposit us in a suspiciously desolate area much farther down the shore. Not that we feared him. He was the one who seemed afraid, eyeing the money the way a superstitious man might study an omen. We stood there, uneasy together, watching him row back into the haze, head bowed under lengthening tendrils of smoke from the pyres. Ray and I took furtive side-glances at each other, like strangers. I had forgotten him in the fire. It was embarrassing to see him so clearly. He seemed wizened and frail, as if an old crook-backed Indian clerk had taken possession of his body.

We were at the bottom of a series of ascending humps, a hole in the topmost, possibly a passage back to the center of the city. Instead of starting the climb, we sat down on either end of a broken spine of earth, both distracted, trying to remember our friendship, neither of us making a sound until Ray surprised me with a laugh; something warm and wet touched my shoulder. When I turned, I saw, head-on, the great luminous moon-face of the cow, a black gleam of snout at my shirt pocket, midnight eyes far apart in high, solemn orbit, speculating on the possibility of eating my American passport, all the smells of the day germinating in the heat of her breath. The cow swung its ponderous, sage's cranium away from me and moved toward Ray, who was kneeling with his passport held aloft in both hands, intoning, "Oh Mother Superior, oh mountain-backed, leper-cunted mother of moth-

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ers, oh gobble-down gutter-rag dead-dog-eating sewer mother, kindly accept this crumb from the American pie—.'' Looking bored, the cow sat down between us, all hush and pallor, so grounded, so serenely, solemnly complete, it put us back into motion, and motion revived our appetites. ''Food! My God!''

Kansas City steaks flash in the mind, golden landscapes of fried chicken, lamb chops and rice piled as high as temples—we talk nothing but food on our way up the sifting slopes; we howl ''Fooo-ood!'' in broken, sobbing mimicry of the beggars' lugubrious ''*Baksheesh*'' as we squeeze through a mousehole into the first dim coil of streets echoing drums, horns and chanting voices overhead and underfoot from gratings like speakers broadcasting the soundtracks of a dozen different movies through the backsides of a dozen theaters with hidden entrances, alleys hooking in at every turn, sending us back on ourselves, up and down spattered corridors of Hindu imagery, elephant gods, monkey gods, rat gods, every niche a shrine, every post the cock of Shiva, but no food for us, not even the smell of it until we're finally funneled into that open central drain with its churning traffic of bicycles, rickshaws and horse-carts.

We eat in a second-floor Muslim greasy spoon overlooking the junkman's vaudeville of the square, our steaming meat curry served on a dried-blood-wooden table made from the remains of an old Indian Railways carriage, Ganges curry that scourges the tongue, hot flashes raking the palate, mouth teeming with fire, sweet, stinging delicious pain that excites all the juices, tears gushing, sweat dripping fast, the burn of the spice like white light in the brain, bringing tones and textures into fierce clarity as we sop and slop and sigh, eyes closed for the hottest, grittiest bites, grinning and weeping at the Mad Hatter's feast, frantic elbows duelling over the crowds of downtown Benares. After each bite we pour holy water on the flames, fanning our mouths, blinking, whistling, Ray, red-faced, laughing at the grey flakes raining from my beard; but we both have them in our hair, grey bits, ashes from the fires. We sprinkle them in the palms of our hands and rub them to dust between our fingers, savoring the clean disintegration of ash as our dinners burn inside us, nothing wasted, everything digested, the ashes dissolving in the whirlpool-eyes of my fingertips.

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Joseph Weizenbaum

SCIENCE AND THE COMPULSIVE PROGRAMMER

There is a distinction between machines whose ultimate function is to transduce energy or deliver power, and abstract machines, i.e., machines that exist only as ideas. The laws which the former embody must be a subset of the laws that govern the real world. The laws that govern the behavior of abstract machines are not necessarily so constrained. One may, for example, design an abstract machine whose internal signals are propagated among its components at speeds greater than the speed of light in clear violation of physical law. The fact that such a machine cannot actually be built does not prohibit the exploration of its behavior. It can be thought about and even simulated on a computer. (Indeed, the Education Research Center at M.I.T. has made computer generated films that place their viewers in the position of observers of a world in which vehicles travel at physically impossible speeds.) The human imagination must be capable of transcending the limitations of physical law if it is to be able to conceive such law at all.

The computer is, of course, a physically embodied machine and, as such, cannot violate natural law. But it is not completely characterized by its manifest interaction with the real world. Electrons flow through it, its tapes move, and its lights blink, all in strict obedience to physical law, to be sure, and the courses of its internal rivers of electrons are determined by openings and closings of gates, again by physical events. But the game the computer plays out is regulated by systems of ideas whose range is bounded only by the limitations of the human imagination. The physically determined bounds, on the electronic and mechanical events internal to the computer, have no significance whatever with respect to that game, no more, that is, than it matters how tightly a chess player grips his bishop or how rapidly he moves it over the board.

A computer running under control of a stored program is thus detached from the real world in the same way as is every abstract game. The chess board, the thirty-two chessmen, and the rules of chess constitute a world entirely separate from every other world. So does a computer system together with its

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operating manual. The chess player who has made a bad move cannot explain his error away by pointing to some external empirical fact that he could not have known but that, had he known it, would have led him to make a better move. Neither may a programmer whose program behaves differently than he intended it to look for the fault anywhere but in the game he has himself created. He may have misread the computer system's manuals, or otherwise misunderstood his computing environment—just as a novice chess player may misread the rules with respect to, say, castling—but no datum existing in the world outside the computer system he is using can be at all relevant to the behavior of the world he has created. A computer's failure to behave exactly as its programmer intends cannot even be attributable solely to some limitation unique to the computer. In effect, every general purpose computer is a kind of universal machine that can in principle do what any other general purpose computer can do. In this important sense, a specific general purpose computer has no limitations unique to it. The computer then is a playing field on which one may play out any game one can imagine: one may create worlds in which there is no gravity, or in which two bodies attract each other, not by Newton's inverse square law, but by an inverse cube (or n^{th} power) law, or in which time dances forward and backward in obedience to a choreography as simple or complex as one wills; one can create societies in whose economies prices rise as goods become plentiful and fall as they become scarce, and in which homosexual unions alone produce offspring. In short, one can singlehandedly write and produce plays in a theater that admits of no limitations. And, what is most important, one need know only what can be inferred directly from one's computer system manual, or constructed by one's own imagination.

An engineer is inextricably impacted in the material world. His creativity is confined by its laws; finally, he may do only what may lawfully be done. But he is doomed to exercise his trade in a Kafkaesque castle from which there is, even in principle, no escape. For he cannot know the whole plan that determines what rooms there are in the world, and how what doors between them may be opened. When, therefore, a device an engineer has designed doesn't work, he cannot always know, or tell by his own reasoning alone, whether he is in an antechamber to success and only his blunders keep him from opening its doors, or whether he has wandered into a closet from which there is no exit. Then he must appeal to others, his teachers, his colleagues, his books, to tell him, or at least to hint at, a formula that will compel the insouciant attendant (nature) to lead him out and on.

The computer programmer, however, is a creator of universes for which he alone is the lawgiver. So, of course, is the designer of any game. But universes of virtually unlimited complexity can be created in the form of computer programs. Moreover, and this is a crucial point, systems so formu-

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lated and elaborated act out their programmed scripts. They compliantly obey their laws and vividly exhibit their obedient behavior. No playwright, no stage director, no emperor however powerful, has ever exercised such absolute authority to arrange a stage or a field of battle and to command such unswervingly dutiful actors or troops.

One would have to be astonished if Lord Acton's observation that power corrupts were not to apply in an environment in which omnipotence is so easily achievable. It does apply. And the form in which the corruption evoked by the computer programmer's omnipotence manifests itself is instructive in a domain far larger than that related only directly to the computer. To understand it, we will have to take a look at a mental disorder that, while actually very old, appears to have been transformed by the computer into a new genus: the compulsion to program.

Wherever computer centers have become established, that is to say, in countless places in the United States as well as in virtually all other industrial regions of the world, bright young men of disheveled appearance, often with sunken glowing eyes, can be seen sitting at computer consoles, their arms tensed and waiting to fire their fingers, already poised to strike, at the buttons and keys on which their attention seems to be riveted as is a gambler's on the rolling dice. When not so transfixed, they often sit at tables strewn with computer print-outs over which they pore like possessed students of a cabalistic text. They work until they nearly drop, twenty, thirty hours at a time. Their food, if they can arrange it, is brought to them; coffee, Cokes, sandwiches. If possible, they sleep on cots near the computer—but only a few hours—then back to the console or the print-outs. Their rumpled clothes, their unwashed and unshaven faces, and their uncombed hair all testify to their obliviousness to their bodies and to the world in which they move. They exist, at least when so engaged, only through and for the computer. These are computer bums, compulsive programmers. They are an international phenomenon.

How may the compulsive programmer be distinguished from a merely dedicated, hard working professional programmer? First, by the fact that the ordinary professional programmer addresses himself to the problem to be solved while the compulsive programmer sees it mainly as an opportunity to interact with the computer. The ordinary computer programmer will usually discuss both his substantive as well as his technical programming problem with others. He will generally do lengthy preparatory work, such as writing and flow diagramming, before beginning work with the computer itself. His sessions with the computer may be comparatively short. He may even let others do the actual console work. He develops his program slowly and systematically. When something doesn't work, he frames careful hypotheses

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to account for the malfunction and designs crucial experiments to test them. Again, he may leave the actual running of the computer to others. He is able, while waiting for results from the computer, to attend to other aspects of his work such as documenting what he has already done. When he has finally composed the program he set out to produce, he is able to complete a sensible description of it and to turn his attention to other things. The professional regards programming as a means toward an end, not as an end in itself. His satisfaction comes from having solved a substantive problem, not from having bent a computer to his will.

The compulsive programmer is usually a superb technician, moreover one who knows every detail of the computer he works on, its peripheral equipment, the computer's operating system, etc. He is often tolerated around computer centers because of his knowledge of the system and because he can write small subsystem programs quickly, that is, in one or two sessions of, say, twenty hours each. After a time, the center may in fact be using a number of his systems. But because the compulsive programmer is essentially impossible to motivate to do anything but programming, he will almost never document his programs once he stops working on them. A center may therefore come to depend on him to teach the use of and to maintain the systems he wrote—and whose structure only he, if anyone, understands. His position is rather like that of a bank employee who doesn't do much for the bank but is kept on because only he knows the combination to the safe. His main interest is, in any case, not in small subsystems but in very large, very ambitious super-systems. In most cases the systems he undertakes to build, and on which he works feverishly for perhaps a month or two or three, have very grandiose but extremely imprecisely stated goals. Some examples of these ambitions are: new computer languages to facilitate man-machine communication; a general system that can be taught to play any board game; a system to make it easier for computer experts to write super-systems. (This last is a favorite.) It is characteristic of many of such projects that the programmer can, for a long time, continue in the conviction that they demand no knowledge apart from knowledge about computers, programming, etc. And that knowledge he, of course, commands in abundance. Indeed, the point at which such work is often abandoned is precisely when it ceases to be purely incestuous: when programming would have to be interrupted in order that knowledge from outside the computer world may be aquired.

Unlike the professional, the compulsive programmer cannot attend to other tasks, not even to tasks closely related to his program, while not actually operating the computer. He can barely tolerate being away from the machine. But when he is forced by circumstances to be separated from it nevertheless, he has his computer print-outs with him. He studies them, he talks about

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them to anyone who will listen, though no one can understand. Indeed, while in the grip of his compulsion, he can talk of nothing but his program. But the only time he is, so to say, happy is when he is at the computer console. Then he will not converse with anyone but the computer. We will soon see what they converse about.

The compulsive programmer spends all the time he can working on one of his big projects. 'Working'' is not the word he uses, it is rather ''hacking.'' To hack is, according to the dictionary, ''to cut irregularly, without skill or definite purpose; to mangle by or as if by repeated strokes of a cutting instrument.'' We have already said that the compulsive programmer, or hacker, as he calls himself, is usually a superb technician. It seems, therefore, that he is not ''without skill,'' as the definition would have it. But the definition fits in a deeper sense than the sense that is related merely to technique; the hacker cannot set before himself a clearly defined goal together with a plan for achieving it, for he has only technique, not knowledge. He has nothing he can analyze or synthesize; in short, he has nothing to form theories about. His skill is, therefore, aimless, even disembodied. It is simply not connected with anything other than the instrument on which it may be exercised. His skill is like that of a monastic copyist who, though illiterate, is a first-rate calligrapher. Thus his grandiose projects must necessarily have the quality of illusions, indeed of illusions of grandeur. He will construct the one grand system in which, soon, all other experts will write their systems. (It has to be said that not all hackers are pathologically compulsive programmers. Indeed, were it not for the, in its own terms, often highly creative labor of people who proudly claim the title ''hacker,'' few of today's sophisticated computer time-sharing systems, computer language translators, computer graphics systems, etc., would exist.)

Programming systems can, of course, be built without plan and in the absence of any knowledge, let alone understanding, of the deep structural issues involved, just as houses, cities, systems of dams, and national economic policies can be so hacked together. As a system so constructed begins to get large, however, it also becomes increasingly unstable. When one of its subfunctions fails in an unanticipated way, it may be repaired so as to make the manifest trouble disappear. But since there is no general theory of the whole system, the system itself can be only a more or less chaotic aggregate of subsystems whose influence on one another's behavior is discoverable only piecemeal and by experiment. The hacker spends part of his time at the console piling new subsystems into the structure he has already built—he calls them ''new features''—and the rest of his time in attempts to account for the way in which substructures already in place misbehave. That is what he and the computer converse about.

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The psychological situation, in which the compulsive programmer finds himself while so engaged, is strongly determined by two apparently opposing facts: first, he knows that he can make the computer do anything he wants it to do, and second, the computer constantly displays undeniable evidence of his failures to him. It reproaches him. There is no escaping this bind. The engineer can resign himself to the truth that there are some things he doesn't know; but the programmer moves in a world entirely of his own making. The computer challenges his power, not his knowledge.

Indeed, the compulsive programmer's excitement rises to its highest, most feverish pitch when he is on the trail of a most recalcitrant error, when everything ought to work but the computer nevertheless reproaches him by misbehaving in a number of mysterious, apparently unrelated ways. It is then that the system the programmer has himself created gives every evidence of having taken on a life of its own and, certainly, of having slipped from his control. This too is the point at which the idea that the computer can be "made to do anything" becomes most relevant, and most soundly based in reality. For, under such circumstances, the misbehaving artifact is, in fact, the programmer's own creation. Its very misbehavior can, as we have already said, be the consequence only of what the programmer himself has done. And what he has done he can presumably come to understand, to undo, and to redo to better serve his purpose. Accordingly, his mood and his activity become frenzied when he believes he has finally discovered the source of the trouble. Should his time at the console be nearly up at that moment, he will take enormous risks with his program, making substantial changes, one after another, in minutes or even seconds, without so much as recording what he is doing, always pleading for just another minute. He can, under such circumstances, rapidly, and virtually irretrievably, destroy weeks and weeks of his own work. Should he, however, find a deeply embedded error, one that actually does account for much of the program's misbehavior, his joy is unbounded. It is a thrill to see a hitherto moribund program suddenly come back to life; there is no other way to say it. When some deep error has been found and repaired, many different portions of the program that until then gave nothing but incomprehensible outputs, suddenly behave smoothly and deliver precisely the intended results. There is reason for the diagnostician to be pleased and, if the error was really deep inside the system, even proud.

But the compulsive programmer's pride and elation are very brief. His success consists of having shown the computer who its master is. And having demonstrated that he can make it do this much, he immediately sets out to make it do even more. Thus the entire cycle begins again. He begins to "improve" his system, say, by making it run faster, or by adding "new features" to it, or by improving the ease with which data can be entered into it

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and gotten out of it. The act of modifying the then existing program invariably causes some of its substructures to collapse; they constitute, after all, an amorphous collection of processes whose interactions with one another are virtually fortuitous. His apparently devoted efforts to enhance and promote his own creation are really an assault on it, an assault whose only consequence can be to renew his struggle with the computer. Should he be prevented from so sabotaging his own work, say be administrative decision, he will become visibly depressed, he will sulk, display no interest in anything around him, etc. Only a new opportunity to compute can restore his spirit.

It must be emphasized that the portrait we have drawn is instantly recognizable at computing installations all over the world. It represents a far less ambiguous psychopathology than, say, do the milder forms of schizophrenia or paranoia. At the same time, it represents an extremely developed form of a disorder that afflicts much of our society.

How are we to understand this compulsion? We must first recognize that it is a compulsion. Normally, wishes for satisfaction lead to behaviors that have a texture of discrimination and spontaneity. The fulfillment of such wishes leads to pleasure. The compulsive programmer is driven; there is little spontaneity in how he behaves, and he finds no pleasure in the fulfillment of his nominal wishes. He seeks reassurance from the computer, not pleasure. The closest parallel we can find to this sort of psychopathology is in the relentless, pleasureless drive for reassurance that characterizes the life of the compulsive gambler.

The compulsive gambler is also to be sharply distinguished from the professional gambler. The latter is, in an important sense, not a gambler at all. We may leave aside the cheater and the professional confidence man, of whom, certainly, neither are gamblers. The so-called professional gambler is really an applied statistician, and perhaps an applied psychologist as well. His income depends in almost no way on luck alone. He knows applied probability theory and uses it to calculate odds and then to play those odds in such combinations and aggregates that his income over a period of, say, a year is predictable by him to nearly a mathematical certainty. That is not gambling. Then there are people who gamble but who are neither professional nor compulsive gamblers. To the compulsive gambler, gambling, the game, is everything. Even winning is less important than playing. He is, so to say, happy only when he is at the gambling table.

Anyone who has ever worked in a computer center, or a gambling casino that closes its doors at night, will recognize the scene described by Dostoevski, himself a passionate gambler, in *The Gambler*.

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> By eleven o'clock, there remain at the roulette table only those desperate players, the real gamblers, for whom there exists but the roulette table . . . who know nothing of what is going on around them and take no interest in any matters outside the roulette saloon, but only play and play from morning till night, and would gladly play all round the clock if it were permitted. These people are always annoyed when midnight comes, and they must go home, because the roulette bank is closed. And when the chief croupier, about 12 o'clock, just before the close calls out, "the last three turns, gentlemen!" these men are ready to stake all they have in their pockets on those last three turns, and it is certain that it is just then that these people lose most.

Dostoevski might as well have been describing a computer room

The medical literature on compulsive gambling concerns itself mainly with the psychogenesis of that compulsion, and then almost entirely from a psychoanalytic perspective. It is, however, not necessary to recapitulate the psychoanalytic argument here, nor would such a detour serve our present purpose. It is enough to say here that psychoanalysts, beginning with Freud, saw megalomania and fantasies of omnipotence as principal ingredients in the psychic life of the compulsive gambler. We have to neither accept nor reject psychoanalytic accounts of the origins of such fantasies—e.g., that they are rooted in unresolved Oedipal conflicts leading to wishes to overpower the father that in turn lead to unconscious motivations to fail—in order to join the psychoanalysts, and novelists like Dostoevski, in seeing the central role megalomaniac fantasies of omnipotence play in compulsive gambling.

The gambler, as the psychoanalyst Edmund Bergler states in *The Psychology of Gambling*, has three principal convictions: first, he is subjectively certain that he will win; second, he has an unbounded faith in his own cleverness; third, he knows that life itself is nothing but a gamble.

What grounds can there possibly be for knowing that one will win a game of pure chance? To know that the roll of a pair of dice or the turn of a card is a purely chance event is to know that nothing one does can possibly effect the outcome. There precisely is the rub! The compulsive gambler believes himself to be in control of a magical world to which only few men are given entrance. "He believes," writes Bergler, "fate has singled him out . . . and communicates with him by means of small signs indicating approval or reproach." The gambler is the scientist of this magical world. He is the interpreter of the signs Fate communicates to him just as the scientist in the real world is an interpreter of the signs nature communicates to everyone who cares to become sensitive to them. And, like the natural scientist, the compulsive gambler always has a tentative hypothesis that accounts for almost all the signs he has so far observed, that, in other words, constitutes a very nearly complete picture of those aspects of the universe of interest to him. The test of the adequacy of

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both the scientist's and the magician's view of the world is its power to predict and, under suitably arranged conditions, to control. Hence, according to Bergler, the compulsive gambler sees himself as "not the victim, but the executive arm of unpredictable chance."

What an outsider regards as the gambler's superstitions are in fact manifestations of the gambler's hypothetical reconstruction of the world Fate has, bit by bit, revealed to him. Experience has taught him, say, that in order to win he must touch a hunchback on the day of play, carry a rabbit's foot in his left pocket, not sit at the gaming table with his legs crossed, and so on. This sort of knowledge is to him what, say, the knowledge of the mathematics of airflow over wings may be to an aircraft designer.

Because the gambler's superstitions are effectively irrelevant to the motions of dice and the orderings of cards, and so on, his hypotheses are very often empirically falsified. Each falsifying experience, however, contains certain elements that can be integrated with the main lines of his hypothetical framework and so save its overall structure. Losing, therefore, doesn't mean that carrying a rabbit's foot, for example, is wrong or irrelevant but only that some crucial ingredient for success has so far been overlooked. Perhaps the last time the gambler did win, a blond young lady stood behind his chair. Ah! So that's it: Touch a hunchback, carry a rabbit's foot, don't cross legs, and have a blond young lady stand behind the chair. When that doesn't work, he calculates that that particular combination works only on Thursdays, and so on and on and on. Bits and pieces of explanation are added on, some are removed, and the entire structure becomes more and more complicated. Eventually, the gambler really does command a conceptual framework that rivals a body of scientific knowledge, at least in its complexity and intricacy. He is an expert in a richly complicated world open only to the relatively small group of initiates who have, through their own hard work and risk taking, learned its mysterious lore and language.

The magical world inhabited by the compulsive gambler is no different in principle than that in which others, equally driven by grandiose fantasies, attempt to realize their dreams of power. Astrology, for example, has constructed an enormously complex conceptual framework, a system of theories and hypotheses which allegedly permit the cognizant to control events. To know, for example, that the conjunction of certain stars on a particular date bodes ill for a particular venture, but that some other conjunction on some other date bodes well for it, and then to undertake that venture on the favored date, that is to attempt to control events.

But the hypotheses of astrology, too, are routinely falsified by events. How then does astrology, and how do other such magical systems, remain at all a force in the minds of men? Exactly as do the hypotheses of the compul-

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sive gambler. First, any contradiction between experience and one magical notion is explained by reference to other magical notions. Thus the entire structure of the magical system of beliefs is supported by its very circularity. This way of protecting the system against assaults upon it that come from reality is especially effective if objections are always met one at a time. For then, the very demonstration that an apparently anomalous fact can be incorporated in the system serves to validate the system. The gambler may, for example, appeal to the fact that he didn't tie his shoelace, as he knew he should have, to account for his "bad luck" on a particular day. That sort of explanation is formally equivalent to the compulsive programmer's assumption that his program's misbehavior is caused by a merely technical programming error.

A second way the conceptual frameworks of gamblers and programmers are protected is by cyclical elaboration. The gambler who suddenly realizes that certain of his tricks work only on Thursdays simply incorporates this new "insight" into his already existing framework of superstitions, thus, in effect, adding an epicycle to its structure. The programmer is free to convert every new embarrassment into a special case, to be handled by a specially constructed *ad hoc* subprogram and thus incorporated into his overall system. The possibility of this kind of unbounded epicyclic elaborations of their systems provides both programmers and gamblers with an inexhaustible reserve of subsidiary explanations for even the gravest difficulties.

Finally, the conceptual stability of a magical or of a programming system may be protected by denying, as Michael Polanyi writes in *Personal Knowledge*, "to any rival conception the ground in which it might take root. Experiences which support [the rival conception] may be adduced only one by one. But a new conception . . . which could take the place of [the one held], can be established only by a whole series of relevant instances, and such evidence cannot accumulate in the minds of [gamblers or programmers] if each of them is disregarded in its turn for lack of the concept which would lend significance to it." The gambler constantly defies the laws of probability. But he refuses to recognize the operational significance of these laws. He can, therefore, not permit them to become a kernel of a realistic insight. A particular program may be foundering on deep structural, mathematical, or linguistic difficulties about which relevant theories exist. But the compulsive programmer meets most manifestations of trouble with still more programming tricks and thus, like the gambler, refuses to permit them to nucleate relevant theories in his mind. Compulsive programmers are notorious for not reading the literature of the substantive fields in which they are nominally working.

These three mechanisms, called by Polanyi, circularity, self-expansion,

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and suppressed nucleation, constitute the main defensive armamentarium of the true adherent of magical systems of thought, and particularly of the compulsive programmer.

Psychiatric literature informs us that this pathology deeply involves fantasies of omnipotence. The conviction that one is all-powerful is, however, one that cannot rest; it must constantly be verified by tests. The test of power is control. The test of absolute power is certain and absolute control. When dealing with the compulsive programmer, we are therefore also dealing with his need to control and his need for certainty.

The passion for certainty is, of course, also one of the great cornerstones of science, philosophy, and religion. And the quest for control is inherent in all technology. Indeed, the reason we are so interested in the compulsive programmer is that we see no discontinuity between his pathological motives and behavior and those of the modern scientist and technologist generally. The compulsive programmer is merely the proverbial mad scientist who has been given a theater, the computer, in which it is possible for him to, and in which he does, play out his fantasies.

The gambler, as we have already said, is subjectively certain that he will win. So is the compulsive programmer; only he, having created his own world on a universal machine, has some foundation in reality for his certainty. Scientists, with some exceptions, share the same faith. What science has not done, it has not yet done. The questions science has not answered, it has not yet answered. Second, the gambler has an unbounded faith in his cleverness. Well?! Third, the gambler knows that life itself is nothing but a gamble. The compulsive programmer is convinced that life is nothing but a program running on an enormous computer and that therefore every aspect of life can ultimately be explained in programming terms. Many scientists, again there are notable exceptions, also believe that every aspect of life and nature can finally be explained in exclusively scientific terms. Indeed, as Polanyi correctly points out, the stability of scientific beliefs is defended by the same devices that protect magical belief systems: "Any contradiction between a particular scientific notion and the facts of experience will be explained by another scientific notion; there is a ready reserve of possible scientific hypotheses available to explain any conceivable event . . . within science itself, the stability of theories against experience is maintained by epicyclic reserves which suppress alternative conceptions in the germ."

Hence we can make out a continuum. At one of its extremes stand scientists and technologists who much resemble the compulsive programmer. At the other extreme are scientists, humanists, philosophers, artists, and religionists who seek understanding as whole persons and from all possible perspectives. The affairs of the world appear to be in the hands of technicians

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whose psychic constitutions approximate those of the former to a dangerous degree. Meanwhile, the voices that speak the wisdom of the latter seem to be growing ever fainter.

There is a well known joke that may help clarify the point: One dark night a policeman comes upon a drunk. The man is on his knees, obviously searching for something under a lamppost. He tells the officer that he is looking for his keys which he says he lost "over there," pointing out into the darkness. The policeman asks him why, if he lost the keys over there, is he looking for them under the streetlight. The drunk answers, "because the light is so much better here." That is the way science proceeds too. It is important to recognize this fact. It is irrelevant and useless to blame science for it. Indeed, what is sought can be found only where there is illumination. Sometimes one even finds a new source of light in the circle within which one is searching. Two things matter: the size of the circle of light that is the universe of one's inquiry, and the spirit of one's inquiry. The latter must include an acute awareness that there is an outer darkness, and that there are sources of illumination of which one as yet knows very little.

Science can proceed in no other way but to simplify reality. The first step in its process of simplification is abstraction. And this means leaving out of account all those empirical data which do not fit the particular conceptual framework within which science at the moment happens to be working, which, in other words, are not illuminated by the light of the particular lamp under which science happens to be looking for keys. Adlous Huxley remarked on this matter in *Science, Liberty and Peace*, with considerable clarity:

> Pragmatically [scientists] are justified in acting in this odd and extremely arbitrary way; for by concentrating exclusively on the measurable aspects of such elements of experience as can be explained in terms of a causal system they have been able to achieve a great and ever increasing control over the energies of nature. But power is not the same thing as insight and, as a representation of reality, the scientific picture of the world is inadequate, for the simple reason that science does not even profess to deal with experience as a whole, but only with certain aspects of it in certain contexts. All this is quite clearly understood by the more philosophically minded men of science. But unfortunately some scientists, many technicians, and most consumers of gadgets have lacked the time and the inclination to examine the philosophical foundations and background of the sciences. Consequently they tend to accept the world picture implicit in the theories of science as a complete and exhaustive account of reality: they tend to regard those aspects of experience which scientists leave out of account, because they are incompetent to deal with them, as being somehow less real than the aspects which science has arbitrarily chosen to abstract from out of the infinitely rich totality of given facts.

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One of the most explicit articulations of the way science deliberately and consciously plans to distort reality and then goes on to accept that distortion as a "complete and exhaustive" account is the computer scientist Herbert A. Simon's own statement of his fundamental theoretical orientation in his book *The Sciences of the Artificial*.

> *An ant, viewed as a behaving system, is quite simple. The apparent complexity of its behavior over time is largely a reflection of the complexity of the environment in which it finds itself.*
>
> . . . the truth or falsity of [this] hypothesis should be independent of whether ants, viewed more microscopically, are simple or complex systems. At the level of cells or molecules, ants are demonstrably complex; but these microscopic details of the inner environment may be largely irrelevant to the ant's behavior in relation to the outer environment. That is why an automaton, though completely different at the microscopic level, might nevertheless simulate the ant's gross behavior.
>
> . . . I should like to explore this hypothesis, but with the word 'man' substituted for 'ant'.
>
> A man, viewed as a behaving system, is quite simple. The apparent complexity of his behavior over time is largely a reflection of the complexity of the environment in which he finds himself.
>
> . . . I myself believe that the hypothesis holds even for the whole man.

With a single stroke of the pen, by simply substituting 'man' for 'ant,' the presumed irrelevancy of the microscopic details of the ant's inner environment to its behavior has been elevated to the irrelevancy of the whole man's inner environment to his behavior!

Simon, who is by the way one of America's most prestigious scientists, also provides us with an exceptionally clear and explicit description of how, and how thoroughly, the scientist prevents himself from crossing the boundary between the circle of light cast by his own presuppositions and the darkness beyond. In discussing how he went about testing the theses that underly his hypothesis, i.e., that man is quite simple, etc., he writes:

> . . . I have surveyed some of the evidence from a range of human performances, particularly those that have been studied in the psychological laboratory.
>
> The behavior of human subjects in solving cryptarithmetic problems, in attaining concepts, in memorizing, in holding information in short-term memory, in processing visual stimuli, and in performing tasks that use natural languages provides strong support . . .

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> . . . generalizations about human thinking . . . are emerging from the experimental evidence. They are simple things, just as our hypothesis led us to expect. Moreover, though the picture will continue to be enlarged and clarified, we should not expect it to become essentially more complex. Only human pride argues that the apparent intricacies of our path stem from a quite different source than the intricacy of the ant's path.

The hypothesis to be tested is, in part, that the inner environment of the whole man is irrelevant to his behavior. One might suppose that in order to test it, evidence that had the potential of falsifying it would be sought. One might, for example, study man's behavior in the face of grief or of a profound religious experience. But these examples do not easily lend themselves to the methods for the study of human subjects developed in psychological laboratories. Nor are they likely to lead to the simple things an experimenter's hypotheses lead him to expect. They lie in the darkness in which the theorist, in fact, has lost his keys; but the light is so much better under the lamppost he himself has erected.

There is thus no chance whatever that Simon's hypothesis will be falsified in his or his colleagues' minds. The circle of light that determines and delimits his range of vision simply does not illuminate any areas in which questions of, say, values or of subjectivity can possibly arise. Questions of that kind, being, as they must be, entirely outside his universe of discourse, can therefore not serve to lead him out of the conceptual framework which, like all other magical explanatory systems, has a ready reserve of possible hypotheses available to explain any conceivable event.

Almost the entire enterprise that is modern science and technology is afflicted with the drunkard's search syndrome, and with the myopic vision which is its direct result. But, as Huxley, too, pointed out, this myopia cannot sustain itself without being nourished by experiences of success. Science and technology are sustained by their translations into power and control. To the extent that computers and computation may be counted as part of science and technology, they feed at the same table. The extreme phenomenon of the compulsive programmer teaches us that computers have the power to sustain megalomaniac fantasies. But that power of the computer is merely an extreme instance of that same power inherent in all other self-validating systems of thought. Perhaps we are beginning to understand that the abstract systems, the games computer people can generate in their infinite freedom from the constraints that delimit the dreams of workers in the real world, may fail catastrophically when their rules are applied in earnest. We must also learn that the same danger is inherent in other magical systems that are equally detached from authentic human experience—particularly in those sciences that insist they can capture *the whole man* in their abstract skeletal frameworks.

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POEMS

Two poems by Philip Levine

TALK TO THE MOON

Late, and the house
slept, except
for me. The night
had climbed the whole way
and turned toward
dawn when I asked
the moon to come down
and settle in the palm
of my left hand. I
must have nodded off
because suddenly
there was the eucalyptus
in the gray light
and two jays
squabbling at the foot
and the jewels
of the grass burned
like iron. So many
words have gone up
like smoke in fog
and come back
with no rain, no bird,
no branch, have
come back
in the numbing light
to squawk

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like mockingbirds
or laugh when that
was too late.
I opened my hand flat
on the table and saw
the four rivers
that never meet, each
freighted with salt,
I saw the dead seas,
the horns of yellow skin,
the pools of shadow
drying up, and
when I turned
it over, the old veins
rose up as though
the hour were urgent
and settled back. On
the dark grained
wood, each finger went
its separate way
crowned with a slip
of moon, and I
shuddered awake
in the cold, a new bird
in spring rain
or an old man casting
fire out of his eyes.

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ON THE MURDER OF LIEUTENANT JOSÉ DEL CASTILLO BY THE FALANGIST BRAVO MARTINEZ JULY 12, 1936

When the Lieutenant of the Guardia de Asalto
heard the automatic go off, he turned
and took the second shot just above
the sternum, the third tore away
the right shoulder of his uniform,
the fourth perforated his cheek. As he
slid out of his comrade's hold
toward the gray cement of the Ramblas
he lost count and knew only
that he would not die and that the blue sky
smudged with clouds was not heaven
for heaven was nowhere and in his eyes
slowly filling with their own light.
The pigeons that spotted the cold floor
of Barcelona rose as he sank below
the waves of silence crashing
on the far shores of his legs, growing
faint and watery. His hands opened
a last time to receive the benedictions
of automobile exhaust and rain
and the rain of soot. His mouth,
that would never again say "I am afraid,"
closed on nothing. The old grandfather
hawking daisies at his stand pressed
a handkerchief against his lips
and turned his eyes away before they held
the eyes of a gunman. The shepherd dogs
on sale howled in their cages
and turned in circles. There is more
to be said, but by someone who has suffered
and died for his sister the earth
and his brothers the beasts and the trees.

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The Lieutenant can hear it, the prayer
that comes on the voices of water, today
or yesterday, from Chicago or Valladolid,
and hangs like smoke above this street
he won't walk as a man ever again.

Frank Manley

GIANT SWINGS

Cette pensée, ce perfectionnement matériel, cette harmonie, cette nuance particulière d'amour, . . . je ne puis croire que, dans leur chair, ils mourront complètement.
—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

The whole thing has a ring of granite,
a wall of granite around it like a magic circle
now, holding in the grey sides of my head,
the eroding sand and the clay where the grass never
grew, under the high-pruned magnolias,
the water oaks . . . And there it is summer.
The streetlights come on and boys still
gather thick as bugs and sing in the dark
like whippoorwills the same song over and over
in circles, going inside and outside themselves—
hanging in air like fish in the water
performing whatever crazy things our bodies
tell us to, eyes popping with the strain,
muscles twisted like rope, and the world slewing
around and around the bar in a giant swing—

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going into a kick, a sharp jerk down,
then rising in flight on something inside us
that jumps through our skin and carries us with it
and us holding on, the bar climbing in front of us,
our murderous bodies going on past
and then going over and out as we gain
our momentum and break the surface like flying fish.
The taps on the heels and toes of our shoes flash
in the darkness. The lights in the windows of houses
we see as we fly, the neon signs of the drugstore
all in a blur as we go in circles like planets
arcing the sky, like pinwheels of flesh,
kicking up sparks from our flashing heels
and move with a motion not wholly our own
till the stars that swim in the blood of our eyes
turn into the lights of the park, turn into
the windows of all the houses to come in our lives
and all the people inside them we love.
And only the bar was real. The bar led
us up and slowly lowered us down
as the giant swing lost its momentum,
and we swung in staggering arcs and dropped off
and fell like death in a pile of bones on the sand,
then rose again, stunned into life, forever inside the wall.

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Judson Jerome

UNCLE MORTIMER'S THEORY

Uncle Mortimer had a theory there's nothing sacred
which he set out to prove
ate his way like a weevil
through family business law church the Masons and three
wives before I got to know him
I don't trust you
Uncle Mortimer I said and he said I had good reason
laughing and returning my pewter ashtray from
his pocket to the table
don't turn your back he said
I like you
then get your hand out of my crotch I said
is nothing sacred?
I suppose that you're inviolate?
very nearly I said at least selective
values said
Uncle Mortimer philosophically are all
subjective you show me any real reason to
refrain from anything or for that matter to
do anything I'll show you a game the rules
like fences in your head Blake's mind-forged manacles
he said blowing his nose on a flag he carried for that
purpose
I couldn't live without those fences I told him

more likely you couldn't die *I* have nothing to die *for*
people are always making contracts you poets for instance
twist everything you want to say to make it fit
some arbitrary form people are always building
altars to sacrifice their Isaacs on people
are always organizing clubs to keep other
people out of always drawing boundaries

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saying MINE well property is theft if you
really want to end war crime racism injustice
just remember one man's sacred cow is another's
beefsteak
it won't work I said
well you tell me
what does? you think if we just keep on pulling up
and putting in fences we'll finally get it right?
well
what about your theory nothing's sacred? I
asked him
what about it?
I mean suppose it's wrong
suppose I went over to that bureau drawer and pulled
out something sacred and you saw it and knew right then
it really was?
he watched me warily
don't worry
I said I wouldn't I don't trust you and besides
the bureau drawer's not where I keep it but suppose

you're lying he screamed
and clutched his sacred theory close
I don't trust you! he screamed
and fled into the night

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Naomi Lazard

A LETTER TO MY DEAD MOTHER

Floating between the islands
on a hastily constructed barge,
wood gnawed through by my own teeth,

I hastened to begin again before
the green silt right down on the bottom
chained me like a barnacle.

So I became like water, drop by drop,
falling against the wind
away from you. Twenty million

threads joined with beautiful
looped knots deep in the cerebellum
called out the cloud race:
Rien ne va plus.

Do you recognize your daughter,
the one you called mercurial?
I live in a house built by three
little pigs, of bones and wire.

This is a house of Wednesdays where
the week doesn't begin and never ends.
One shaft of pure moonlight
reveals it for what it is.

I flow like water through this place,
kneel at the window, watch you
take over the night.
You are lying down there in the street
with your arms flung out over your head
as if you were calling to me.

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The dark is flayed by lights,
and your shadow riddled by nails.

My motions are hollow as a dead bug
in a bottle. Your long and thirsty lip
is curling, your eye beginning to swell.

Mother, it is life that is mercurial,
rushing past me with your grief
on its face. And I have no prayer,
no incantation. I slide into the crack
between two chairs, with a child
squirming in my arms.

The water is your tears.
The barge is our family home.
The three little pigs are off
betting my life at the track.
The child is the child I was.

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Vadim Belotserkovsky

LETTER TO THE FUTURE LEADERS OF THE SOVIET UNION:

An Alternative to Solzhenitsyn's Program

"Not through witty criticism, but only by proposing a better and, above all, a wholly realistic way out, with clearly defined courses of action"—writes Solzhenitsyn[1]—"can one convince him that his proposals are wrong." He writes this, convinced that his is the only possible proposal for a peaceful transformation of the Soviet Union.

I believe he is mistaken. And now, after the publication of the collection of articles *From beneath the Boulders*, it is quite clear that Solzhenitsyn's proposals to the Soviet leaders are not an attempt to find a compromise solution, but rather a complete program with a definite political theory and with supporters.

There is an earlier letter to the Soviet leadership, which, I think, outlines a far more realistic road to peaceful changes and which is not reactionary. I have in mind the letter "On a Question of Great Importance" by Andrei Sakharov, Valerii Turchin, and Roy Medvedev.

However, the course and methods suggested by them, and their analysis of the Soviet system and society, leave some gaps which should be filled in order to present a convincing alternative to Solzhenitsyn's proposals and views. As Sakharov has correctly pointed out, these views pose a grave danger because of their "parallelism"—insofar as they lend support to the official Soviet propaganda with

[1] In the preface to the second version of his "Letter to the Leaders of the Soviet Union." In the heat of polemics on the substance of this letter no one has paid attention to the *ethical aspect* of its second, public version (which, moreover, carries the same date as the first one that was sent to the Soviet leaders), nor to the nature of the changes made.

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their violent criticism of Western democracy and democracy in general, and of progress and humanism, their criticism of "obsequiousness" to the West, their strongly nationalistic trend, and their exaggeration of external military threats. And, as Mikhail Mikhailov has remarked in his "Timely Thoughts," no less dangerous is the temptation they represent to compromise with totalitarianism in respect to authoritarianism. Such a compromise would render meaningless all the past sacrifices and struggles to democratize the Soviet Union.[2]

Apart from everything else, I think that Solzhenitsyn's proposals suggest the most unrealistic course, *if his aim is still to prevent a "physical" revolution.*

For the Soviet leaders to renounce Marxist ideology today would be like officers abandoning their oath of allegiance and deserting their flag in order to placate the rank-and-file who had been roused by a brutal barracks regime or a senseless war. A revolt would then be unavoidable.

Too many things have been done under the banner of Marxism-Leninism, too many sacrifices made, to renounce this banner suddenly and admit that over half a century of national history has been a mistake! Half a century, packed with events, that is equal to the five previous centuries (a fact disregarded by many who talk about traditions)! Let us not forget that Russia today is a country whose level of general education is among the highest in the world! Such a step would be taken as a total self-unmasking of the leaders, as an admission that they do not have and never have had anything but a mere thirst for power. It would be regarded as a panic action and a world-wide, infamous disgrace: to have made a fool of a great nation for more than half a century! And people would certainly refuse to believe that renouncing the old ideology could turn wolves into lambs, careerists into altruists, and bureaucrats into humanists; that a gigantic country's centralized economy, unthinkable without a huge bureaucracy, could become efficient and profitable; or that KGB-men would be content to watch street traffic, to prevent pedestrians from being

[2] The author of the present article has also published a critical review of Solzhenitsyn's letter in *Novoe russkoe slovo* (New York), April 10th and June 15th, 1974.

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hit by cars! People in Russia today are too sophisticated to nurture such illusions!

If all of a sudden the Soviet leaders were to adopt Solzhenitsyn's course, this would be the shortest way to *physical* revolution. But the only realistic road, or, the only theoretically PEACEFUL one, leading to Soviet Russia's renewal, is conceivable on the basis of socialist ideals and principles. They are not so false as they look to Solzhenitsyn and to others who share his opinions; and, they have not lost their attraction for broad areas of Soviet society. A religious faith in Marxism and the infallibility of Lenin's model of socialism is something else; *this* faith has, indeed, been abandoned by all. But it is time to analyze the current situation in the Soviet Union.

Objective Obstacles to Democratization

Long ago, while still in the Soviet Union, I occasionally asked myself: Why, when everything is in an obviously poor state, does someone at the top not even try to change and improve things? I realized that the principal, almost insuperable, difficulty consists in making the *very first* "move." After this, further moves, programs, and objectives are much simpler. I realized that the position of hypothetical Soviet Dubceks is infinitely more complicated than that of their Eastern European colleagues, and that their road is beset with heavy obstacles and fraught with grave dangers.

Above all, there is the fear of the people, of popular reaction. This fear is rooted in the leaders' awareness that in the event of any liberalization what they know about the chaos of the country will become common knowledge. The same writers and journalists who today fear revolution (from which they expect no personal benefits) will willy-nilly pave the road to it, if censorship is relaxed. They will be drawn into professional competition. Who likes to lag behind when it comes to writing trenchant articles, making outrageous disclosures, bringing terrifying facts to light, expressing pungent thoughts and making new demands? And even average citizens, among whom there are plenty of educated people, will hardly remain silent, since for them democratic freedoms are not the end, but merely a means to free themselves from the oppressive "authori-

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tarian'' chaos, poverty, and generally poor quality of life.

Everyday life is sorely affected by mismanagement and disorder, and at times is almost unbearable. Ramshackle wooden barracks or worn-out railway vans serving as living quarters, filth, cold, repugnant food, frequent lack of hospitals, medical centers, electric light and drinking water, damp and unheated schools for children, are only some of the features of Soviet life. Here are some figures, taken from a survey of 2,700 workers' settlements near new industrial installations or construction projects in the *northern regions*, shown to me at the Central Committee headquarters of the Trade-Unions Federation.

Hospitals were lacking in 483 settlements, medical centers in 286, kindergartens in 396, day-nurseries in 388, public baths in 113, service shops for residents in 833, electric light in 88 and drinking water in 340 settlements. Sixty percent of all houses were declared unfit for habitation.

We also know about the low level of wages, the shortages and the poor quality of goods. And although the Moscow intelligentsia believes that the lot of kolkhoz peasants has improved, a restricted report by the Deputy Minister for Trade (made available to *Izvestia*) stated that some 50 percent of money in circulation is not counterbalanced by goods, and that this imbalance exists mostly in the provincial cities and in the countryside.

Moreover, the USSR ranks last among the industrial nations in work safety. In the Ministry of Public Health I was shown data on air pollution in mines. In the United States and Europe the pollution rates vary between 0.02 and 0.05 percent, in South Africa it was 0.2, but in the Soviet Union it was 2 percent. And physicians believe that the official figures are too low.

This is bound to happen, because the lion's share of the Soviet budget is consumed by an unprofitable and inflated heavy industry. Thus the needs of machines and factories are taken care of first, while people are forced to work in unsafe and unhealthy conditions. Countless losses—caused by lack of interest and carelessness, and by the mistakes of the planners—always have to be compensated for.

In the Soviet Union an industrial plant is built for non-stop operation, because stoppage would mean certain revolution. Industrialization has become self-propelling, and this is both the ''secret'' and

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the evil of the existing system. The arms race, various "prestige" projects, and the feeding of a top-heavy managerial and supervisory apparatus aggravate the situation.

According to a restricted report, prepared by the Institute of Economic Mathematics at the University of Novosibirsk, 95 percent of the output of the machine tool industry feeds heavy industry, while half the production of the consumer goods industry directly or indirectly serves the needs of heavy industry.

Another very serious obstacle in the way of reforms and democratization is the proliferation of management, inherent in any nationalized economy.

Any reform in the Soviet Union must go hand in hand with decentralization and, consequently, with a radical reduction of managers. However, officials who are otherwise compliant balk when their positions are threatened. Furthermore, as a result of numerous miscarried reforms and countless broken pledges, Soviet society has lost faith in the leaders' ability to achieve any reform; and this lack of faith, in turn, makes efforts at reform more hopeless.

The last, and possibly the most important, obstacle to truly democratic reform arises from the character and quality of the top leadership. A potential Soviet Dubcek has very strong reasons to fear that he will be removed, possibly even physically liquidated, as soon as he reveals his intentions.

As a result of the whole of Soviet history, especially of the Stalin era, a Party career has become so unpopular and repugnant that most self-respecting people capable of doing anything else shrink from the prospect. Potential reformers might find their way into the leading circles, but they will hardly find much support there.

Social Support for Democratization

However, before reflecting on what a hypothetical Soviet reformer could do, one has to examine the question of whether Soviet society is ripe for democracy. If it is not, then—as Solzhenitsyn sees it—it would indeed be senseless to institute anything approaching a democracy.

In the Soviet Union today, the annual number of graduates from institutes of higher education exceeds the total number of people with higher education in tsarist Russia in 1917. But they are more deprived of human rights and privileges than they were in old Russia.

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And it is more difficult for educated people who do intellectual work to act as pawns of an authoritarian regime than it is for manual workers.

What kind of authoritarian regime then are we dealing with? More than by material cares, more than by the strait jacket of pseudo-Marxism, most Soviet people are worn down by authoritarian and arbitrary rule, by the bureaucratic anarchy where the least initiative is inconceivable without official blessing, where rules and regulations are sometimes so self-contradictory that the implementation of one entails the violation of others and the risk of punishment. At the slightest relaxation of pressure, pent-up dissatisfactions would break out. And should anyone then try to reimpose an authoritarian regime, it would be resisted.

Everything in Flux

Finally, we must consider the emergence of a monolithic social stratum, the "worker-engineers," which might be the main hope of future democracy.

Most engineers and technicians come from and live in a working-class environment. They have no special privileges and are exploited at least as much as the workers themselves; many of them earn even less than skilled workers. There is also no serious class-competition among engineers, and they are always in short supply, especially in the provinces.

The engineers, designers, and technicians, who represent a large and growing percentage of the "factory folk," are intellectualizing the working class. What they stand for is a radical but gradual transformation; above all they do not want a return to capitalism. They are opposed to the means of production reverting to private hands via the sale of shares (the only conceivable method of restoration), because the present privileged elite and the clandestine wheeler-dealers who have lived as parasites on the bureaucratic system would end up as majority shareholders under the new system.

The worker-engineers and the scientific-technical intelligentsia as a whole are interested in *constructive* reforms. More than anyone else, they associate the lack of freedom with *authoritarian* bureaucratic disorder, and yearn for *order* based on democracy and justice. They are not tempted by the possibilities of blind destruction or

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anarchy and have retained a good measure of common sense and moral integrity.

Russia's worker-engineers and scientific-technical intelligentsia are now involved in an irreversible process of integration with the industrial civilization of the Western democracies. If they display a certain political passivity, this is due to their particular situation: they are cut off from the centers of information and are personally more vulnerable. If they are fired and blacklisted as politically "unreliable," their situation in a country where all industrial enterprises are state-owned is catastrophic.

Certain humanitarians nowadays paint horrifying pictures of the human condition in the Soviet Union. They find their models mainly among the state's "servitors," the most enslaved and demoralized social stratum, which is incapable of independent action. This group can only become dangerous if it is mobilized by the government, and even then only if it remains unopposed.[3]

The Only Peaceful Path

To be successful, I believe, the first and most difficult steps towards serious political and economic change from above must be as follows:

a) attract the immediate support of the worker-engineers and scientific-technical intelligentsia and put representatives of this class at the source of power;

b) inspire hope and spur the public at large to some positive activity aimed at gradual change.

In their letter *A Very Important Question*, Sakharov, V. Turchin and Roy Medvedev suggested that the first step should be "a statement by the supreme organs of Party and Government about the

[3] The fear of revolution in the USSR displayed by Solzhenitsyn and those who share his views derives, in my opinion, from a refusal to accept democracy, especially when it is based on socialist ideals. Behind this refusal lies a distrust of the man from the masses, perhaps even fear of the people—genophobia. (Nationalist tendencies mean the elimination of genophobia.) Solzhenitsyn apparently accepts the man of the people only "in his place," and as a man who knows his place like the soldier Bogatyrev in *August 1914*. Solzhenitsyn evidently believes that democracy and revolution in the USSR will lead only to new forms of the socialism he so hates. And when he speaks of the inevitability of bloodshed and ruin in the case of revolution, or even democracy (see his article in *From beneath the Boulders*), he is, in my opinion, merely rationalizing the fears I have mentioned above.

In the USSR today there is no indication that any social stratum of significant size could or would actively support the regime in the event of a revolution. However, every action entails an equal and opposite reaction, and a large section of the population has a vital interest in order and democracy.

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necessity of further democratization, and the rate and methods of its introduction." But in my opinion, this is insufficient. A mere declaration of this sort is most unlikely to dispel skepticism and distrust. Nor would it guarantee that the next steps would necessarily follow—especially if we consider the composition of the Party leadership and the psychological mood of the country. The history of Khrushchev's rule is a good illustration: the Malenkov opposition, the sabotage or misapplication at local levels of Khrushchev's initiatives, and his final overthrow. Actually, Khrushchev made no serious attempt at democratization even though his first step was unusual and revolutionary in character: he had to unmask the cult of Stalin's personality and rehabilitate the "enemies of the people" (actions similar to those demanded of Dubcek in the Prague spring). In my opinion, a suitable first step could be the implementation of the recommendation contained in Lenin's *Testament*: that one hundred ordinary workers, who had never held high-level posts in either Party or Government, be made members of the CPSU Central Committee, where they should have unhindered access to all documents and full voting rights.

Lenin's recommendation would, of course, have to be amended now to provide for the inclusion of engineers and scientists in the Central Committee, not just workers. These ought to be elected freely, by secret ballot, from an unlimited number of candidates at their places of work, and should account for up to 50 percent of the Central Committee membership.

At the same time it would be necessary to realize another essential condition, namely the exposure of the Central Committee's and the Government's work to the public view, the *glasnost* Lenin endorsed. And public trust would be strengthened if the Central Committee's members (in accordance with Lenin's proposal) were elected for a limited period, so the unremovable leaders could be replaced.

Should candidacy be limited to Party members? This would be perfectly feasible, because the rank-and-file Party members among the worker-engineers and scientists are not much different from their non-Party colleagues, and an unlimited choice of candidates and a secret vote would surely ensure the election of the most honest and competent people.

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The prestige of Leninism would make a coup d'état, or the liquidation of the reformers, too risky a business. The opponents of reform would have to come out against Lenin openly. They would have to realize that an attempted coup would mean the rejection and destruction of Marxist ideology and mark the end of the regime.

After the elections to the Central Committee it would, of course, be necessary to extend the "principle of one hundred workers" to all organs of power. Here, again, the criteria for candidacy should be professional rather than regional. Committees could be set up to deal with such urgent issues as: amnesty for political prisoners; introduction of trial by jury; gradual relaxation of censorship; admission of a co-operative press (such a press existed in the USSR until 1925); the formation of associations and parties which do not pursue anti-constitutional aims; withdrawal of Soviet troops from foreign territory; replacement of KGB and MVD forces by units of the people's militia (i.e., partial implementation of the Marxist principle of an armed people), etc. Another immediate aim would be to raise the standard of living and balance the economy.

Most of these measures could obviously be financed by halting the arms race, by reducing the size of the armed forces (and the length of compulsory service), by eliminating prestige projects from the space program, and by slashing the direct and indirect incomes of high officials, applying a principle which Lenin repeatedly called a *sine qua non* of socialism.

The culmination of the *preliminary* reforms should be in free elections to the soviets and the transfer of all power to them. This would guarantee nation-wide free public debate of all legislative measures and political questions.

I am convinced that, under conditions of freedom, the people would elect a democratic model without hangovers from the past or transplants from Western models.

Solzhenitsyn and his supporters believe that democratization would be accompanied by a bloody upsurge of nationalism among the non-Russian peoples. This makes their type of "democratization" difficult to understand. There would be no likelihood of a bloody revolt if all the nationalities of the Soviet Union were offered the choice of secession or of remaining in the Union under conditions of their own determination.

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Judging by Igor Shafarevich's article in the anthology *From beneath the Boulders*, the principle of self-determination (like most other democratic principles) is unacceptable for the Solzhenitsyn school of thought. "National separatism," writes Shafarevich, "has acted as an empire-breaking force. It received its impulse from the spiritual *vacuum* created by destroying the feeling of pan-imperial unity, the exalted and unifying aim." Coming from a member of the Soviet Human Rights Committee, this statement is really remarkable (the word "chain" might be more suitable than "aim" in this context).

However, I am convinced that all kinds of "imperial" goals are alien to large sections of the Russian people. I know nothing about Shafarevich's "spiritual vacuum," but I do know that a majority of educated people in present-day Russia are clearly aware that the empire must collapse, and that this will benefit Russia. Deprived of colonies and slaves, the country is likely to intensify its own development.

In my view, anyone who wants to retain "Great Russia" is an enemy of the people. The centrifugal forces in the national republics have reached—to borrow a metaphor from Solzhenitsyn—force 10 on the seismic scale. The absence of real national freedom coupled with the authorities' lip-service to this freedom causes enormous popular discontent. The "empire" is maintained only by inertia, military force and the KGB. Any radical changes in Moscow are likely to burst the dam of national patience, and any attempt by Moscow to stop the tidal wave will merely replenish it with blood. For the most part, the Russian people have never perceived any benefit in a "Great Russia," nor are the masses ready to give moral support to the ruthless suppression of the national movements in the republics.

Russia itself is a multinational country. Those people who speak of a resurgence of Russian national consciousness and Slavophilism are also enemies of Russia. Nationalism among a people which, itself unoppressed, oppresses others is rampant chauvinism. The ruling class in Russia is monolithically Russian, while Russian society is a heterogeneous conglomeration of different national elements. Hence the propagation of any brand of Russian nationalism not only parallels official propaganda, but also makes it more difficult to create a *social*-democratic movement—the only viable political solution to the major problems.

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The Reality of the Proposed Course

Although it is the most realistic peaceful course, the path to reform which I propose has, as I see it, very little chance of realization. The only likelihood of reformers coming to power in the Soviet Union would be in the case of a serious crisis and a domestic upheaval of the kind we have witnessed in East Europe, although the conditions for reform were much more favorable there than in the Soviet Union.

Precisely because of these major differences between the Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union, it is to be feared that assumption of power by Soviet party leaders in the role of reformers *in time of crisis* will not change anything. Nobody will believe in their sincerity and they will have to rely on force, primarily on the special troops of the KGB. And the reformers would have to assume power at the very beginning of the crisis—an unlikely possibility considering the qualitative composition of the Soviet partocracy which is hardly able to change for the better.

Still, I do not consider that the presentation of my plan is useless. I hope that my approach will at least help to show more clearly the true conservatism of Soviet Party leadership. And I am sure that the propagation of democratic and evolutionary ideas can not only help the cause of reform in the Soviet Union, but ultimately also can have the effect of making the semi-revolutionary or revolutionary course less painful.

And there are many indications that the time for change seems to be approaching in the Soviet Union. The voicing of opposition views, despite severe reprisals, the many flights abroad, and the wave of uprisings and strikes that swept the country in the early 1960s (Novo-Cherkassk, Aleksandrov, Murom, Temirtau, etc.)—all indicate that "pressure" is mounting to the point of crisis.

The country's economy is also entering a new critical phase. Labor resources in the countryside, on which one could always draw, are dwindling. The birth rate of the Russian population has declined to a catastrophically low level (the coefficient is now less than 1.0). Hence the extensive development and expansion, together with the abundance of natural resources, which previously held the Soviet economy afloat, are now rapidly declining.

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This state of affairs, long familiar to specialists, is now being recognized even by the Soviet leaders. In his last address during the electoral campaign Brezhnev said: "Our national economy, whose development rate exceeds the rate at which labor resources grow, already demands maximum economy in the use of labor." In the future this demand will become *still more acute*. "It is, therefore, imperative," Brezhnev concluded, "to effect a shift to intensive methods of economic development." His statement also admits that so far such a shift has not been achieved, "despite all efforts by the Party and Government." And, it would seem, it cannot be achieved without radical reforms, and at the price of large-scale concession-building (now timidly begun by Brezhnev) and modernization of industries with the aid of foreign capital, followed by a transition to their joint exploitation, that is, at the price of colonialism. The cheap labor of Soviet engineers and workers, who at the same time are more qualified than those of the developing countries, may prove advantageous for foreign concerns. (American trade-union leader George Meany has already stated that Americans do not want to see their country flooded with cheap goods, produced by the "slave-labor of Russian workers.") This may lead to an open conflict with the current ideology, and face the country with a choice between a democratic revolution and the authoritarian one. In such a crisis, frightened Party functionaries might stage a semi-fictitious court revolution, exchanging "Marxism" for an openly chauvinistic-clerical ideology, for which they might find Solzhenitsyn's ideas useful.

However, I believe such a course would lead to revolution. But in this case it might involve even greater bloodshed, as the authorities might be supported by the service groups (those engaged in goods distribution, handicrafts, the hotel and restaurant trade, repairs, etc.), which tend towards chauvinism and, moreover, are likely to benefit from the concessions granted to foreign firms.

For a great and civilized nation all roads eventually lead to democracy, democracy based on socialist ideals, modified, of course, by historical experience. As I see it, they will be realized through a synthesis of capitalism and socialism, along the lines of recent trends in Eastern Europe.[4] But the costs will depend upon which road is taken.

[4] I have outlined my views on such a synthesis in the book *Rossiya i mir—po kakomu puti?* (Russia and the World—Which Path?).

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Terrence Des Pres

PROPHECIES OF GRACE AND DOOM: The Function of Criticism at the Present Time

In *The Anxiety of Influence* Harold Bloom argues that "the meaning of a poem can only be another poem." He means that the poet spends his time rewriting works of earlier poets, an activity inherently perverse because governed by the poet's maniacal need to dispossess—by tactics of "misunderstanding, misinterpretation, misalliance"—the suffocating priority of his great precursors, whose presence he experiences as the absence of himself. The feeling of dead-weight and dead-end is strong in Bloom's book, and the revelation he offers—that we are witnessing the "death of poetry"—comes as a foregone conclusion. The past piles up, fewer and fewer poets can hope to breathe freely, and "it seems just to assume that poetry in our tradition, when it dies, will be self-slain, murdered by its own past strength." The vitality of art is thus a negative life, a life experienced as death; and what Bloom puts forward, finally, is his version of The End. I say *his* version, for although his solipsistic terms sound new, the same cannot be said for the sense of death informing his ideas (he describes critics, for instance, as "necromancers, straining to hear the dead sing"). Ihab Hassan has informed us in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* that literature is a suicidal process; soon it will self-destruct and deliver us into that happy silence for which we yearn. And just to take a last example, Leslie Fiedler wishes us to know that "serious" literature is dead, so now we can go back to the true stuff, to a literature of gut response, by which he means pornography.[1]

To mention Fiedler is to suggest another round of iconoclasm. But no, that would be misleading. Boredom is more to the point. These supersaturated men of letters are bored. Upon their days and thoughts the demon of noontide rides, the *acedia* of the desert saint whose cave has ceased to shimmer with divine intent. Belief in art-as-religion and literature-as-salvation, which inspired the evangelical tone in criticism from Wordsworth

[1] This, presumably, will be the point of *What Was Literature?*, the book Fiedler says he is writing. It was certainly the point of a lecture delivered at Colgate University in the fall of 1973.

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through the New Critics, has gone down with the leveling wind. Grand prospects no longer lend import to the critical enterprise, no longer sanction the literary overload of brilliant minds, and in the path of their come-down stand practical questions. What more is there to read? What more to say, write, teach? What more, in short, can "make it new" mean now?

But that, again, is only a part of the problem. If we were moved by works of literature the way Rilke was struck when he beheld the Archaic Apollo—*Du musst dein Leben ändern*—there could hardly be this prevailing sense of *déjà vu*. There would be no projection of a death in the heart, no symptomatic plaint of ennui and loss. Literature does not die, no more than the world itself goes down, despite the claim, two thousand years of it, that doom impends. Never, perhaps, has literary creation been more fertile, diverse, or just plain plentiful. No, the prophets of doom have something else in mind, and the persistence of their cry is a measure of genuine pain.

In youth the reader comes to literature as to a world of wondrous truth. He consumes book after book of poetry and prose, and ranging thus the heights, borne onward by joy, he comes to acquire fields, disciplines, methods. He becomes critical—and at some point, finally, he becomes aware that his fundamental relation to literature has changed. The large works are behind him, naive delight is gone. The realms of gold have receded and no new world, no second dawn, no alternate route to transcendence remains. And now he grows to covet that first look into Chapman's Homer; he begins to envy the young their innocence. What has died, in this case, is not literature, but the capacity for naive response, that state of openness and wonder which is necessary to literature *as an experience*. The "monuments" become monuments merely, and the realm they occupy begins to look like a graveyard or, at best, a museum.

Not a happy situation. But let us not revive the old excuse and say we murdered to dissect; not dismiss the problem by calling criticism the villain. Let us rather examine a strange bit of literary experience, a fact more common than the silence surrounding it suggests: that at least for some of us, a day comes when we admit to more pleasure, and often more fine satisfaction, from reading criticism than from reading original texts. Literature, that is, begins to engage us less than the realm of critical discourse. Of course there are exceptions: new publications, new discoveries, texts in areas of intense concern. But for literature in general the case is otherwise, especially for those big works which make The Tradition. These we discuss in class, write about in journals, build books around in order to keep jobs and maintain prestige. But we do not, I think, come to them freely, in need, or with that earnest joy of youth. Among those who care for literature, many will read the next book about Greek drama or Milton's art, but very few will ever go back to

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Philoctetes or *Paradise Lost*. And quite possibly those who continue to read Shakespeare will delight as much in the critical activity his works inspire: books like Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* or Brower's *Hero and Saint*. Without intending to, and often half in guilt, we find ourselves preferring works of criticism—Auerbach's *Mimesis* or Benjamin's *Illuminations* or even, God knows, Fiedler's *Love and Death*—despite sure knowledge that everything in these matters depends on the text.

Spinoza defined philosophy as "the intellectual love of God," by which he meant the never-finished approach to reality through thought. Recently Lionel Trilling has applied this definition to criticism, describing it as "the intellectual love of literature." Behind Spinoza lay the gnostic belief in mystical ascent to Godhead. No such faith animates Trilling's claim, and yet the case is similar. The problem is one of *approach*, a term to be taken in its double sense: method, nearing. And central to both Spinoza and Trilling is the idea of absence and motion—a movement of the ardent mind perpetually toward and around that which it *has not* but *knows of*, toward some distant plenitude which, apart and in itself, seems all but out of reach.

Aesthetic objects tend in any case to generate their own mediation. Works of art complete their existence in the world, come finally to contain the consciousness which views them, by this capacity to surround themselves with concepts. So sure is this process, that Wellek and Warren could define "the total meaning of a work of art" as "the result of a process of accretion, i.e. the history of its criticism by its many readers in many ages." There is something decidedly Hegelian in all this, Hegel being the first (as I shall suggest in a moment) to attempt a solution to the problems of Romantic and Post-Romantic consciousness. Which is to say that the relation of criticism to art, or of thought to essence, is a specifically "modern" problem. Criticism has always flourished, yes, but the rise of criticism as an occupation with its own discipline and methods, as a universal and in some sense *necessary* activity, has assumed its definitive form within the last two centuries.

To be "critical" means to turn from immediate to mediated response; and this has been the mark and burden of Western thought since Kant, who brought the thrust of the Enlightenment to a head when he decided no longer to do philosophy, in the old ontological sense, but rather to examine the limits of that doing. The range of consciousness, Kant argued, was narrower than commonly supposed. Mind could account for surfaces, for the phenomenal aspect of things, but it had no formal access to numina or essence. In consequence, surface and depth split apart, and the world's substantial presence began to recede. It faded into the famous *ding an sich*, a realm apart, to be known by faith alone. And *there*, rather than *here*, everything of ultimate concern—God, freedom, the ground of selfhood—was

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henceforth to be located. Or was all this a consequence? For the gap Kant described did not open only in metaphysics. What had come about was an end to the feeling of rapport with essence, an end to the immediate reception of things in depth. This predicament has been accounted for in every conceivable way: attributed to, for example, the collapse of belief; the rise of reason; the dissociation of sensibility; revolution; the move from rural to urban order, and so on. But that a change occurred seems evident; and when it did, the joy of plenitude gave way to nothingness and dread. Substance vanished into the void, leaving in its wake that sense of absence—*le néant des choses humaines*, as Rousseau put it—central to Romantic and therefore to modern consciousness.

At some point in the 18th century, that is, an obsessive awareness of loss and emptiness began to haunt men's deepest thoughts; and by the beginning of the Romantic period, the condition of absence had become one of the principal determinants of aesthetic representation. The development of modern painting—its collapse of perspective, its celebration of texture and surface, its denial of any world beyond itself—is one example. Modern literature, with its emphasis on symbolism and language-worlds, is another. In *Blindness and Insight*, Paul de Man goes so far as to suggest that literature, by its very nature as a self-conscious fiction, is a representation of absence. Literary works take their origin in "the presence of a nothingness," de Man argues; and "poetic language names this void with ever-renewed understanding." The assumption here is that all signification, whatever else it may serve or point to, signifies finally the absence of that which is signified. Any text is the image of something *not* present; or as Valéry said of poetry, it "never speaks but of absent things." De Man puts it this way: "here the human self has experienced the void within itself and the invented fiction, far from filling the void, asserts itself as pure nothingness." Literature, therefore, which was once the supreme concentration of truth and ineffable presence—"In the beginning was the Word"—now becomes an embodiment of the world's emptiness. As in Beckett's work, there is only the word, nothing but the word, and the word persisting in its own nonbeing.

Among the principal bearers of meaning in human experience are the self and other selves, the world as a bounded totality, and, of course, works of art: all possess a surface (the medium of their concrete being) which conveys a corresponding depth (the feeling of significance), such that the presence of surface *is* the presence of depth. What has now been lost is the capacity for immediate engagement with surface-as-depth. This, as I have suggested, is the situation which Kant brought to focus. He left it to Hegel to bridge the gap, and Hegel was equal to the task. Having lost its immediacy, essence would have to be reconstituted in thought. The immediate would have to be

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mediated and thus delivered anew. The split between subject and object would be closed by mental labor, and here Hegel was truly prophetic. For what he acknowledged is what literary criticism, or indeed all critical discourse, covertly admits: *the need to reestablish response in depth through conceptual mediation.*

Naive reception is beyond us. Myth is only myth; fictions are fictions; and their generative power, which depended on taking them for real, on accepting their surface as their truth, has drained away. How hard, for example, Yeats worked to keep the aura of those "sacred books" he loved in his youth. How stridently he insisted, against his ingrained skepticism, upon the force of symbols, upon the mysterious heart of mere stories. He arrived at a sort of truce, neither side claiming victory, and so with ourselves: we too strive to read the depth of surfaces and stay in the presence of meaning. This striving is the activity we call criticism. Of course criticism concerns itself with history, biography, social milieu; with analysis of style and linguistic structure; with judgment and interpretation and methods of scholarship. But beyond these, or precisely in the doing of these many things, criticism achieves its deeper aim. It becomes the medium through which we reenter the great works of art. It is how we hold beauty before us, how we share in its life, how we live again in its presence.

And often criticism is the prior, or concomitant, act of perception which allows the margin of genuine enjoyment we feel while reading. Take, for example, Pater's remark in his essay on style: "one of the greatest pleasures of really good prose literature is in the critical tracing out of that conscious artistic structure, and the pervading sense of it as we read. Yet of poetic literature too; for, in truth, the kind of constructive intelligence here supposed is one of the forms of imagination." For many of us, in other words, the exercise of critical perception has become a habit of mind as we read, and may even be the device through which we are *able* to read. When T. S. Eliot remarked that "criticism is as inevitable as breathing," he was suggesting that reading and criticism have become aspects of a unified act, the mutual conditions of each other. Northrop Frye makes a similar point: "it is not possible for any reader today to respond to a work of literature with complete or genuine *naiveté*. Response is what Schiller calls sentimental [self-conscious] by its very nature, and is hence to some degree involved in criticism." Surely this was not the case for Shakespeare's audience, let us say, or for the readers of Richardson. But if criticism has become "inevitable," we hardly do justice to the problem if we say, as many do, that the critical faculty has crushed all purer response. On the contrary, the mediating act of criticism allows, as if by stealth, entrance to the power of the work itself.

I am assuming, then, that the amazing proliferation of critical activity

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amounts to a cultural phenomenon in its own right; that it is a mode of mental behavior rooted in our time and plight; or that, as Roland Barthes describes it, "criticism is not at all a table of results or a body of judgments, it is essentially an activity, i.e., a series of intellectual acts profoundly committed to the historical and subjective existence (they are the same thing) of the man who performs them." Barthes goes on to define criticism as "a second language, or a *meta-language* (as the logicians would say), which operates on a first language (or *language-object*). . . . It is the 'friction' of these two languages which defines criticism." Criticism, in other words, is the act of penetrating a text by refracting it through another text, the former concrete and inaccessibly vibrant, the latter conceptual and as readily applied to the density of its object as, say, mathematics is to the otherness of multi-dimensional space.

Barthes stops short with a formal definition. The relation of criticism to spiritual need is left to others, to Paul Ricoeur for example, a French theologian who goes to the heart of the matter by defining criticism as a means of provisional grace. "We are in every way the children of criticism," says Ricoeur in *The Symbolism of Evil*, "and we seek to go beyond criticism by means of criticism, by a criticism that is no longer reductive but restorative." Having lost "the immediacy of the symbol," we resort to criticism as "the modern mode of belief in symbols." By means of this strategy we participate once more in the depth and sensation of meaning. As Ricoeur puts it: "I can still today communicate with the sacred by making explicit the prior understanding that gives life to the interpretation. Thus hermeneutics, an acquisition of 'modernity,' is one of the modes by which that 'modernity' transcends itself, insofar as it is forgetfulness of the sacred. I believe that being can still speak to me—no longer, of course, under the pre-critical form of immediate belief, but as the secondary immediacy aimed at by hermeneutics." What is hoped for, and already partly achieved, is the birth of a "second naiveté," a new fullness of response made possible through criticism. Ricoeur concludes: "In every way, something has been lost, irremediably lost: immediacy and belief. But if we can no longer live the great symbolisms of the sacred in accordance with the original belief in them, we can, we modern men, aim at a second naivety in and through criticism. In short, it is by *interpreting* that we can *hear* again."

There is, of course, an altogether mundane reason for the compulsiveness of modern criticism: we do it as a trade, as a job like any other. It is also the form of warfare which self-interest takes among factions contending for dominance in academic and literary worlds. These are decisive factors, and in the context of economic necessity the older justification—the pursuit of excellence—looks silly indeed, especially when (as Edmund Wilson liked to

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point out) much of critical energy spends itself on second- to tenth-rate works. At some point, however, the pursuit of excellence becomes its own end; it fulfills the desire to participate in greatness and wonder, and here the critical enterprise turns back to the deeper need it nourishes. To take at face-value most of the claims which scholars and critics make in their own defense has become, to say the least, difficult. Criticism has not purified language or sensibility, nor established a canon, nor upheld quality; nor has it convinced students of literature that in the neighborhood of genius, as Matthew Arnold put it, "the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can." For the critic himself this may be true, but then his effort is private, and what it comes down to is an admission of the *need* to "feel and enjoy . . . as deeply as ever we can."

Enjoyment springs from enjoinment, and criticism is the medium through which we regain connection with art's vitality. Arnold confessed as much, in his famous essay on criticism, when he concluded that "to have the sense of creative activity is the great happiness and the great proof of being alive, and it is not denied to criticism to have it." Criticism becomes a mode of possession, or of being possessed; and if I have turned the meaning of Arnold's statement slightly, I have hoped to touch the source of his admitted urgency. What troubled him was the loss of connection with great art, and the possibility that contact could be lost completely. Recently Frank Kermode has voiced a similar fear. He foresees a possible world in which "*King Lear* will be forgotten like the tulip mania"; and in "Survival of the Classic" he argues that criticism is the medium through which the classics remain present. "Classics," Kermode says, "are works of art that survive," and the "urgent question is, how does survival work?" It works because "critics, teachers, adapters, all, however original, are committed to the transmission of the classic." Preservation of the great works is vital because "we know that when they depart the other gods go with them, so that we can say quite soberly that they have the quality also of the palladium."

To call literature a *palladium*—a sacred object having the power to preserve the city, the state, or in this case the spiritual content of a culture—and then to see the crisis of our time in terms of a struggle to keep art present, is also to suggest the larger context of the problem besetting "our sect," as Kermode calls those who practice criticism. "Survival of the Classic" was presumably written in the middle to late sixties, years when the apocalyptic fury of the young was reaching its peak and the coming generation seemed bent on a New World having no "communion" with the past. A world with "no place for *Lear*" is of course a fearful prospect; but an end to the alienation of man from his own creations is something quite different. Marx, for instance, never for a moment wished to sweep away the classics. Far

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otherwise, he would have all men participate in them to the full. Liberated man would be aesthetic man, man in substantial rapport with himself *through* his works.

This is not the place to treat of causes and cures; but in order to grasp the situation of criticism we might at least keep in mind that criticism itself did not precipitate our complaint. Already in the 18th century a sense of loss and then of emptiness began to invade the self and its creations; and surely it was less than coincidence that during this same period there arose the split between self and society, which, since then, has become a condition of existence for almost everyone. Rousseau, proclaiming *le néant des choses humaines*, lamenting the deceptiveness of surfaces, was also the loneliest of men. Loss of plenitude, and the pain of isolated selfhood, are the major themes of Romantic consciousness; and what these kinds of experience suggest by their conjunction is that, in a profound way, capacity to perceive the world's solid presence—to feel substance and depth in the self, in art, in other selves—depends on rooted participation in fundamental human relations. We may at least speculate that the perception of plenitude wanes as soon as we lose touch with the energies of social existence; as soon, that is, as men are no longer embedded in their social matrix *beyond reserve*. But who lives without reservation? The alienation of man from his works has been compounded by a world of relations so dishonored and unjust and ironic, that estrangement itself, a willful holding of the self apart from its transactions, becomes a necessity of moral survival. No wonder nothingness haunts us. So long as we cannot belong to the life of society, life as much theirs as our own, works of art will be present, at best, as silence. Which is to say that the condition of absence, to which criticism addresses itself, has social and therefore political determinants; and that the function of criticism at the present time—to grant a provisional grace—is provisional only.[2]

[2] So far as I know, there is no non-reductive theory of the relation between social order, social being, and the symbolic substratum of perception which social experience generates and works of art embody. Durkheim was on the right track, I think, and the works of Mary Douglas seem much to the point. See in particular her *Natural Symbols* (1970), which develops aspects of the idea that "the perception of symbols in general, as well as their interpretation, is socially determined."

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MODERN DOCUMENTS

Ad Reinhardt

THE ARTIST IN SEARCH OF A CODE OF ETHICS

Sometimes referred to as the "conscience of the art world" because of his abrasive insistence on the morality of art, Ad Reinhardt became increasingly disturbed by the commercialism and philistine attitudes he saw beginning to dominate the art world. A life-long member of the American Abstract Artists, Reinhardt, who died in 1967, was the only first generation New York School painter who never painted the figure. Educated at Columbia University, he based his sophisticated aesthetics on the theories of a "pure" art formulated by Roger Fry and Clive Bell. Reinhardt did not waver in his commitment to abstract art, on the one hand, and to socialist politics, on the other. However, he never confused the two, although he was active politically and drew cartoons for the leftist weekly, PM.

Toward the end of his life, Reinhardt saw abstract art, which had achieved what seemed to be permanent success, reduced once again to a minority role in the changing structure of the art world, now captivated by the media-oriented styles like "op," "pop," and "minimal" art. Although Reinhardt took some pleasure in the belated recognition of his work (he was the last of the New York School to be officially canonized; his black paintings were still drawing ridicule at the time of his death), and enjoyed being thought of as the father of "minimal" art, he was depressed by what he correctly perceived as a declining morality among artists. "Art," he frequently complained, "is not the spiritual side of business."

*In an unpublished talk delivered at the Artists Club on April 1, 1960, Reinhardt articulated a moral position from which he never diverged—although he judged others as having been corrupted from worship of the golden calf. Dedicated ironically to the "seventeen irascible artists" of 1950**

*Reinhardt is referring to the celebrated "irascible eighteen" who picketed the Metropolitan Museum in 1950, protesting the Museum's bias against American art. Along with Barnett Newman, Clyfford Still, Jackson Pollock and Robert Motherwell, Reinhardt was a member of this group, whose protest is recorded in a frequently reproduced photograph of the New York School. By reducing the number of "irascibles" to seventeen, Reinhardt dissociated himself from what he felt were the compromises made by his contemporaries.

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who have "successfully adjusted themselves to their environment," the piece, at the time, was a diatribe mainly against Reinhardt's contemporaries whom, he confided to me, he could never forgive because he felt they *should know better. Conceived during the waning years of "action painting," the talk had a puritanical, moralizing tone that was unfashionable at a moment when American art was just beginning to be joyously celebrated. Today, Reinhardt's concern regarding the decline of ethical standards seems a prophetic view into the seventies. His fear that art would be invaded by anti-art, and adulterated by a confusion with life and its activities, appears entirely validated. His appeal to a reform movement that would re-establish values seems especially apposite at this moment when many members of the art community are beginning to be justifiably concerned with such matters.*

The following unpublished manuscript is from Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt, *which I edited for Viking Press as one of the Documents of Modern Art, a series Reinhardt originally started, with Robert Motherwell and publisher George Wittenborn, to disseminate the writings of the modern European artists in America.*

—Barbara Rose

A general ungentlemanly agreement that "artists should not talk" prevents artists from twinging each others' consciences nowadays. A popular myth that "the dirty work" takes place only outside the artist's studio and not in his own mind, also helps ease the artist's burden and helps make his shame a little more shameless. But if the art world is "a sink of corruption and crime" that the poor struggling artist never made, who did?

Artists may well "no wonder" why, as a decade and a half of expressionist debauchery and neo-surrealist delinquency draws to an end; words like "conscience," "ethics," "morality," "guilt," and "corruption," creep into artists' conversations with increasing frequency.

What is "the Failure of Art-Conscience" at present? How is our time out of joint these days? Do we have a history of art morality? A moral art history? Is there a code of art ethics? What are the unconscionable crimes of artists?

Is the art "sink of corruption" like any other ordinary sink? Can it be condoned with "that's life" or "to err is human" or "even the air we breathe in is polluted"? The everyday world has Law, Order, Justice, fines, fit punishments, and a Commissioner of Air Pollution. Everything all together may be beyond good and evil, right and wrong, but art is not.

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Corruption in art cycles moves forward always in the name of life, fate, nature, humanity, animality, society, cosmic-anxiety, reality, surreality, automatism, organicism, vitalism, existentialism, primitivism, irrationality, unconsciousness, spontaneity, visions, images, impulses, sensations, impressions, expression, business, romance, "silent poetry," "frozen music," etc. The reform movement and atonement occur always as a return to the strong neo-classic virtues of detachment, honesty, rationality, clarity, coldness, emptiness, sterility, formalism, intellectuality, idealism, meaninglessness, and contentlessness.

The cockles of the hearts of our plebeian curators and critics must have been warmed considerably in the middle forties when after several "waves" of cold, dry, empty abstraction, some mythopoetic artists made public their divination that "there is no such thing as a good painting about nothing," presaging a wave of hot, loaded, compromised art that was to flood the markets and wash away, by the fifties, all lines of distinction, and make a quiet, dignified profession into a rabble-rousing profit-making profession where "anything goes," "anything can be art," "everyone is an artist," and "an artist is like everyone else."

But everyone is not an artist. Some artists are better than others. Some artists have less clear consciences. Some artists get no chances to become corrupt. No artist is guiltless. Some artists are no good any way. The moral argument in art always focuses on the "artist as artist," not on the "artist's artist," or the (American) people's artist, or on the artist as a human, or super-human or sub-human being, or on the artist as anything else.

Naturally it's difficult for an artist to draw a line, but an open, indulgent, demoralized art situation, presents too many temptations for art-immorality and art-rascality, too many opportunities for conscienceless artists.

In the absence of a lawfully constituted art authority, then, these Thirteen Rules of Ethical Conduct for Professional Fine Artists is hereby respectfully submitted for everyone's approval.

1. It is not right for an artist to make believe that he doesn't know what he's doing, when everyone else knows what he's doing, or to say that there is no wrong, or that it's "a matter of personal opinion," or that "time will tell" what's not right. Artists who leave decisions of what is not right to someone else, especially to those who don't know, should be put to the rack and given the brush. Artists who write that art is "Voyaging into the night, one knows not where, on an unknown vessel—etc.," should be put in irons and chained to galley-oars.

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2. It is not right for artists to "overprofessionalize" or "overamateurize" their profession in the practice or teaching of it. An artist who thinks that a good social conscience will fix up a bad artistic conscience, or who believes that what helps "Business Buy American Art" helps him, or that "Art is Education and Communication for Everybody," should be taken into custody and booked for suspicion.

3. It is not right for artists to palm off their brush-stroke marks for grass as "a feeling for Nature" or to keep alive the idiotic idea that they see some "structure underlying the surface appearances of reality." Artists who think that art is not a hothouse product but an outhouse by-product, and who participate in "New Nature" or "Nature in Abstraction" ideas, should be sentenced to a term of hard labor in the fields.

4. It is not right for artists to act as if "abstraction" and "representation" do not make any difference. Artists who do not remember Clive Bell's sentence, forty-seven years ago, that "every sacrifice made to representation is something stolen from art," and who paint "abstract-expressionist" flames, girders, grasses, and sunsets, should be apprehended for fencing hot merchandise. Artists who portray naked old ladies, young undressed boys, beauties (Marilyn Monroe) and beasts ("New Images of Man"), should be put into solitary.

5. It is not right for artists to mix their art up with other arts, with the idea that the arts augment each other, or to claim that their paintings beautify architecture, or that their church and synagogue decorations are an "integration of art and religion." Artists who consort with poets and musicians should be accused of contributing to the delinquency of minor arts.

6. It is not right for artists to plug their paintings as a valuable report or record of World Wars and Peace, or to pass themselves off as visionaries of cosmic orders or seismographs of universal disorders. Artists who claim they symbolized "Victory" in the Pepsi-Cola forties or the "Voice of America" in the post-Pepsi-Cola period or "the Atomic Age," should be found guilty of having given aid and comfort to the enemy.

7. It is not right for an artist to make his bag of tricks a matter of life and death. Artists who send chills, however delicious, up curators' spines with warnings like, "Let no man undervalue the implications of this work, or its power for life, or for death, if it is misused," should be charged with arson and false alarm.

8. It is not right for artists to make themselves out "characters," bumpkins, or "ordinary chaps," and to instill in young and old followers the faith

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that "If this shmo can do it, so can I." Artists who cook up short art careers for friends and supporters, and are in turn confronted with, "if these guys can do it, I can do it better," and finally with, "I'm the champ, they're the spoilers," should be disbarred for committing a public nuisance.

9. It is not right for artists to spend their daytimes, on stage, playing "Good-time-Charlies" and "Hard-to-get-Gerties," and their nighttimes, behind the art scenes, being "Jack-the-Rippers." Artists who believe that it is just as easy to fall in love with a rich curator as it is with a poor critic, or that murder in art or artist-slaughter will not out, should have their entertainment licences revoked and their premises closed.

10. It is not right for artists to encourage critics to think that sloppy impasto is Dionysian and that neat scumbling is Apollonian. Artists who peddle wiggly lines and colors as representing emotion should be run off the streets. Bad artists who, after years of hard pulling, finally make good paintings, and good artists who start pushing bad paintings for easy money, deserve the same punishment.

11. It is not right for artists to think that painting is like prostitution, that "first you do it for love, then you do it for others, and finally you do it for money." An artist who makes a living from his art should be registered as a "Lumpen-Artist," issued an identity card, and dismissed with a suspended sentence.

12. It is not right for artists to feel its all right to be "irascible" when young and without means, and "docile" when doddering and well-heeled. Artists stricken with "fall-out" or "sell-out" should be Institutionalized, pensioned, and enabled to lead a comfortable hand-out-to-mealy-mouth existence for the rest of their natural lives.

13. It is not right for an artist who knows what's not right, and especially who is without sin, not to tell artists who don't know what's not right, what not to do, and not to cast the first stone.

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BOOKS

POETRY AND POLITICS

THE POLITICAL IDENTITIES OF EZRA POUND AND T.S. ELIOT. By William M. Chace. Stanford University Press. $8.95.

To speak about a writer's politics is to run a dual risk: on the one hand, the temptation to deny the centrality of politics to the work of art; on the other, the temptation to judge the artist by his politics. The state assimilates; the writer is left to worship. Not a particularly encouraging situation. "In the economy of art," wrote Trotsky, "as in the economy of nature, nothing is lost, and everything is connected to the large." Unfortunately, that *everything* blankets the writer, too. The political vision may be massive, undigested, irritating, and intrusive, but there is no way the writer can avoid it. Not, at least, in our century.

On the whole, the politics of the major literary modernists makes for depressing reading. Authoritarianism has rarely found itself in such respectable company. The democratic temperament is swallowed up by the presence of democratic man, that most "average" creature. The "lower middle class society," which Eliot so desperately wanted to keep under control, is not significantly different from the "wad" Mailer scorns. Positions shift, attitudes remain. The Left wards off its demons through its glorification of blacks and something called "Third World Peoples"; the Right through its worship of manners and styles which are banal when they are not simply evil. And the critic, nervously left to guard the gates of art, is afraid that to subject the politics of the modernists to close scrutiny becomes, in effect, a statement about modernism itself, as those who objected to Pound's receiving the Bollingen Prize instinctively understood.

Of all of the modernists, Eliot's politics have been most open to question. Perhaps this is because Pound's politics are so patently half-baked (even the sympathetic critic can only stand bewildered before a mind capable of equating Mussolini with Jefferson and Christ), perhaps because of guilt over Pound's incarceration in St. Elizabeth's in which the roles of victim and victimizer were reversed. Even Pound's naked political stupidity—for a poet so overwhelmingly concerned with history he was blind to historical reality—

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works in his favor with a generation of critics for whom history is still essentially bunk. I suspect, however, that the chief reason is that Pound embodies modernism for us. It is difficult to like him, impossible not to admire him. As critic, poet, and propagandist for the art he believed in, he was a remarkably generous man. The difficulty he presents comes only after one recognizes that the sources of his politics are also the sources of his innovative power as a poet. Pound twisted everything to his own use. This is, of course, what poets have done down through the ages, but what Pound twisted was not the shape of style, but the shape of history. One of the reasons Mr. Chace's book is so refreshing is that he recognizes this. "The single greatest difficulty in Pound's work is one of order, not of allusion."

Because he is willing to take both of these poets on their own terms, Chace demonstrates that Pound's fascism does not represent an abberation in an otherwise aesthetically anchored literary career. Pound's political attitudes remain central to his poetic imagination. Both he and Eliot were, as Chace puts it, "entangled in, even obsessed by, politics." And to examine the political-literary relationship in their work is to see that work as we do not really wish to see it. The result is singularly depressing. For Pound and Eliot seem to have extended what Trotsky once called "the plot mentality of history" into an aesthetic order all its own.

Perhaps what is most interesting about Pound's political ideas is the effort his critics have made to separate the politics from the poetry. The poetry promised liberation, the politics extinction. And this still remains the case. While reading this book, I happened to speak to a Jewish-American poet who argued that Pound was not really an anti-Semite at all. I could, of course, have shown him the lines in *The Cantos*, the passages in *Guide to Kulchur*, the transcripts of Pound's Italian radio broadcasts during the war. I could have quoted chapter and verse, but probably to no avail. When applied to artists and writers, the tolerance of intolerance remains a potent legacy. Making it new is still more imperative than making it human.

Pound's was an essentially reactionary temperament, linked to a crotchety suspicion of the democratic ethos. The adoration of the strong man that led him to Mussolinni is visible in a "Leftist" writer like Steffens, who can move from Lenin to Henry Ford to Hitler without even pausing to catch his breath. Orwell told us more than we want to know about the intellectual's love of power. (It is, I suspect, the chief reason behind Orwell's present lack of popularity.) Because the poet tends to see his craft as the heart of culture, his "is the true voice of feeling and health in any culture. As a corollary, the strong poet looks with admiration to the strong leader. The muse is quickened as much by authority as by beauty."

For all of his pedagogical plumbing, Pound possessed a smalltown

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mentality. Attacking the Jews, Roosevelt, or Churchill, he sounds like a street-corner Fascist. The desire for order, for the known stamp of things, can be seen in almost all of his work. Other writers have insisted that history conform to their demands, but it is difficult to think of another modern poet with such a personal relationship to history. History may be a nightmare in *The Cantos*, but it is a nightmare manipulated by the man who possesses the secret, Pound himself.

And despite efforts to portray him as a martyr, Pound was granted respectability, even a kind of perverse heroism, while confined to St. Elizabeth's. George P. Elliott might have bitterly reminded us that "the Auschwitz ovens were scarcely cool" when the *Pisan Cantos* were written, but most critics were happier to dismiss Pound's hatred of Jews as his self-confessed "worst mistake," a "suburban prejudice" better left alone. In our own time, the "demo-liberal ideology" against which Pound fulminated is even less fashionable than it was in the late Forties. Given the present cultural climate, it is far easier to attack a democratic socialist, Orwell, than a fascist, Pound.

Eliot's is a more complex and less fashionable case, even for Mr. Chace. For the past decade, it has pretty much been open season on Eliot. What was once necessary, challenging that middle-aged orthodoxy that stifled us all, now begins to parody itself. We have been so tendentiously liberated from "Mr. Eliot" that the aggressive spontaneity grows equally middle-aged. Poetic attitudes mock themselves sooner or later. The didacticism of middle-aged clerics has been replaced by the spontaneity of self-conscious liberators. Perhaps this kind of thing simply testifies to the limitations of poetry's public voice. And yet, one is still left more uncomfortable by Eliot's politics than by those of Pound.

It is not merely his greater intelligence which makes Eliot more disturbing. There is something essentially slippery in Eliot; he remains an actor even in his political beliefs, but an actor who cannot get beyond the pose. Pound practiced what he preached: he did broadcast for Mussolinni, he did call for the destruction of "rich Jews," etc. Eliot was not a man of action. And there is little even literary critics admire more than the man willing to take action. Pound's anti-Semitism—true to his essential blindness to historical reality—reverses the roles of Jew and non-Jew.

> the yid is a stimulant, and the goyim are cattle in gt/proportion and go to saleable slaughter with the maximum of docility.

Eliot's is more honestly rooted in the very marrow of that tradition for which he hungers. This does not make it any more acceptable, but it does make it less hysterical. Anti-Semitism is simply absorbed into the anti-democratic roots of

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the poetry, one more version of an aristocratic Christian myth which has tried to maintain the mold of a world order ever since it became a political force.

Pound had the advantage of being without any formal religious ties. His nativism had a great deal in common with the mind and imagination of a Henry Ford, and it is not by accident that he shared so many of Ford's prejudices. Richard Hofstadter had this kind of mentality in mind when he pointed to the "curiously persistent linkage between anti-Semitism and money and credit obsessions" in the United States. But in "Mr. Eliot," the political positions were framed by a need for Christian tradition. And if this led to the nonsense of *After Strange Gods* and *The Idea of a Christian Society*, it is also what kept Eliot from ever going beyond what Chace calls a "flirtation with fascism." Where Pound's politics evolve within his poetics, Eliot's remain the cry of a man haunted by the vicissitudes of his existence, as if lurking in the bushes of his fantasies were hosts of those "free thinking Jews" whom he feared. Ultimately, he was unable to accept what he logically should have accepted. His intelligence stood in the way. He "abjured both power and consciousness and, in so doing, negated not only fascism, but all contemporary ideology." Ironically, his inability to go all the way became his chief political sin.

Mr. Chace has written a book that merits greater attention than it has yet received, one of the best studies of writers and politics that I know of. Determined from the outset to face the fact that Pound and Eliot were in large measure molded by their political fears and beliefs, he manages to avoid moralizing at their expense. The story he traces for us reinforces an old if uncomfortable idea: no matter how much one may want it to be different, ideology constricts writers. No political system is the writer's friend, although a political position can be among his needs. Mr. Chace patiently analyzes the political positions these two writers took. Like some writers who moved towards Marxism, they felt contempt for people, both as a Whitmanesque en masse and as individuals. But where the Marxist writer needs to consider himself in the vanguard of history, the reactionary desires to freeze history, to remove the democratic uncertainty—along with the democratic mob—from his midst. If Mr. Chace is correct in believing that the "plateau of structured belief" which Pound and Eliot reached is what contemporary liberals "desire, but cannot attain," one can still wonder whether the much-abused liberal cannot argue that his doubt, his inability to reconcile, is the only courageous judgement that can be made—both of those who, like Pound and Eliot, make that reconciliation at the expense of democratic reality and those who, like the liberal himself, cannot reconcile at all.

Leonard Kriegel

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THE NAME OF THE GAME

THE KING'S INDIAN. By John Gardner. Alfred A. Knopf. $8.95.

John Gardner tells stories. A hundred years ago he might have been a great popular novelist, serious in the way popular novelists then could be. As it is, his story-telling is mixed with a good deal of philosophizing, solemn and playful, and with a lot of modern post-narrative self-consciousness. In a very few years he has tried an astonishing number of fictional modes, each time working from a strong narrative tradition, each time questioning it, each time returning.

I began by thinking, in late 1973, that I would try to talk about his greatly ambitious *The Sunlight Dialogues* and the wonderful shorter parody, *Grendel*. Then his long narrative, *Jason and Medea*, arrived. Shortly afterwards *Nickel Mountain* was published. And as I tried to work out my thoughts about at least three novels, *The King's Indian* turned up. Gardner writes faster than I can read; faster, I'm beginning to believe, than anyone but the early Dickens, who managed to write three novels at the same time and edit a monthly journal on the side.

No doubt Gardner has Dickensian ambitions, but where Dickens was a genuinely popular writer, Gardner is a professor. No doubt also, on the evidence of the novels, he is a remarkably learned and good one; but as a writer he not only earns the rewards, he pays the price of professing. Dickens could unselfconsciously make myths out of the materials of a popular culture in which he participated. Gardner makes, or rather unmakes, myths out of the materials of a very high culture playing about the pop; almost every word he writes seems to bear upon it the scar of the past of Western literary culture. He is cursed, or blessed, by a characteristic modern literary consciousness.

What writer we might care about these days isn't? Barth, Borges, Nabokov, Pynchon, Coover. But with Gardner it is a little different. Though literary virtuosity is almost a condition of serious writing these days, though literary games are both part of the sport and part of what really counts, Gardner plays the game most of the time with a straight-forwardness that makes me feel—happily and uneasily at once—that the real name of his game is narrative. Even as he includes (in all of the stories I have read) elements to undercut the traditions of narrative he uses, each story depends for its strength and energy on the suspect narrative itself. So he gives us a gallery of nihilistic philosophers, of magicians and sleight-of-hand people. And always,

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somewhere behind the continuous sequence of actions, there is a bomb of meaninglessness waiting to explode the mythic significances just as we are getting comfy with them.

Still, enduring behind nihilism, meaninglessness, violent disruptions, there is Gardner saying yes, winking a bit shyly, and wall-eyed at the embarassment of saying it under the burden of all that knowledge. And I think the effort to say yes is the clue to the strange way his apparently very modern perceptions of narrative-as-lie, of inanity, of inconsecutiveness seem to be edging backwards, not to parody and rejection, but to affirmation and acceptance of the narrative-epic-novelistic tradition. The way to come out smiling (or almost) is, after you've shown that you understand all the limits, all the falsifications and mistaken assumptions, to end by writing your own crazy narrative, to assimilate without mockery the elements of such traditional fiction that can survive the curse of professorship and disenchantment.

I confess to liking Gardner best when the play is most overt, not, as in *The Sunlight Dialogues*, where the epic pretensions are too great, too serious, and too long. Like the other Gardner novels, it is a virtuoso performance, though Gardner pretends in it that the real virtuosity is that of the Sunlight Man, the tortured and scarred magician-hero. If *Grendel* is parody of epic, with the point of view deliberately screwed around, and *Nickel Mountain* is new pastoral, *The Sunlight Dialogues* is a late nineteenth century chronicle novel—a cross between *The Rainbow* and *Buddenbrooks*. It's about the decline of a great family, and in opposition to the Sunlight Man, the family's crazed, brilliant, nihilist black sheep, there is the requisite anti-hero, a flatulent, apparently ineffectual and aging police chief. The book's center is a set of dialogues between the chief and the Sunlight Man. Elaborately and fancifully staged amidst hocus-pocus, they are filled with classical allusions, subversive moralizing, or anti-moralizing, tests of the ordinary man's strength. Inarticulate or cliché-ridden, the police chief endures. But it is all virtuosity; and within a novel whose structure depends upon a nineteenth-century personal engagement with characters, it gets rather dull. The professorial identity is most oppressive where it is most hidden. There's just a bit too much myth-making or anti-mythmaking. The farting police chief and his blind wife don't carry the day or sustain our engagement, though the narrative seems to insist that they must.

But there's no denying the virtuosity, indeed, the brilliance of much of that large book. And its audacity in attempting a New York State version of Faulkner's Mississippi chronicles is at least admirable. *Nickel Mountain* once again requires the nouns: virtuosity, brilliance, audacity. It reads as though it had been invented to become an instant classic: short, well-made, ironic, gently evocative of a pastoral mode which its own materials would seem to

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belie. Here is the pastoral of the truck stop, with large diesels always roaring dangerously in the background, with massive tractors for plowing and reaping and tearing their passengers to pieces, with wars in the not too remote distance sending home their maimed. But Gardner incorporates all the violence and industrial destruction into the mock pastoral retreat in order to reaffirm the values of the pastoral and to tell a story—really—of redemption through love. And it's not even embarassing.

Its hero, Henry Soames, is a further simplification of the farting police chief. Gardner seems to have said to himself that he had made a lot of wickedly articulate characters before; now he was going to develop the goodly inarticulate ones. So Soames achieves the dignity of cliché against a wickedness that has no articulate spokesman except violence itself. He wrestles with passionate, explosive Billy Buddian feelings; marries the knocked-up teen-ager who comes to work for him; befriends the lonely, fragmented, harvester-maimed veteran; and accepts the selfish lover of his child-wife. And he does all this while struggling with his own mortality, having just recuperated from a heart attack, and while eating like a horse. It ought to be deeply moving, and unquestionably it has its moments: particularly the last scene, in which Soames and his legitimized son watch an old couple bring their dead son's coffin out of its grave. But like most other big moments in the novel, it feels like a set piece. Ah! what a way to finish a novel: with a resurrection. But Gardner's too smart for us and sets it in the context of a skeptical grave-digger and bickering old parents, and Soames' child ending by saying to Soames, "I don't love you." But fat Soames—and pastoral Gardner—have the last word: "Poor dreamer," he says to the boy, implying, among other things, the inescapability of love through all this muck of mortality and bitterness. It is the characteristic movement of Gardner's work: the convention asserted, the convention tested and apparently found wanting, the convention reasserted. The problem is that it is all so clever (or even better than clever) that it is the convention only, rather than the particular experience of the fiction, that comes through alive.

It may be a merely modern prejudice, but Gardner's art seems to work much better when the play is less disguised in the trappings of the realistic fiction of *The Sunlight Dialogues* and *Nickel Mountain* and more on the surface of the language itself, as in *Grendel* and in the extraordinary long title story of the new volume, *The King's Indian*. Serious playfulness is Gardner's real talent. *Grendel* seems to have achieved the stature of a modern classic—at least in so far as it represents a commitment to parody and dark comedy and something like nihilism in a short, fully achieved form. Anyway, *Grendel* is very funny and curiously moving; maybe because Gardner is bound there by the terms of his parody to be unselfconsciously engaged with its hero. Grendel

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does all the telling, and he puts Gardner's preoccupations immediately on the surface of the fiction. The game—the parody of epic and, therefore, of epic implications—is the heart of the narrative, in form and substance. Gardner's novels can be very talky, and if the dramatic context for the speculative talk is not itself either funny or exciting, the speculation gets a little boring, no matter how clever. Here the talk, unlike that of the Sunlight Man, is perfectly right.

Gardner works very hard at context. *Grendel* uses the sophisticated traditions of realistic narrative to spoof the heroic context of Grendel's world; at the same time, the context spoofs realistic narrative. And all that spoofing finally cancels itself out, in bewilderingly funny ways, until we are left only with the wonderful imaginative energy of the invention itself—which is precisely where the book wants to take us. Who, after all, would have thought to see Beowulf's story from the perspective of his enemy, Grendel, but a Lubbockian gone slightly mad? And who but Grendel (and a modern scholar of Old English) could begin to see the nobly austere world of mead-halls and spear-Danes as self-serving, petty, corrupt, and, worst of all, frightened. In *Nickel Mountain* Gardner plays with old-fashioned problems of point of view for new purposes, but here the play seems almost for its own sake, and it becomes delightfully generative. A backwards bildungs-roman (Gardner always does force us to see the literary context), *Grendel* grows to a self-destructive cynicism. And the guru of evil is an old fire-breathing dragon, thoroughly bored with his own wisdom, and quite a crotchety old school-master. A fantasy himself, he speculates between hot burps about time and space, determinism and free will, the emptiness of fantasy and imagination. All the time Gardner pretends that the speculations aren't serious. Yet the cynical old dragon, espousing a devilish materialism ("Get as much gold as you can," he tells Grendel, "but not *mine*"), challenges the very art that creates him, rejects art as mere illusion. Now that's really diabolical. Gardner would be the *scop* whose song Grendel hears, angrily, rising from Hrothgar's hall, if a *scop* properly scorched by the dragon's burning cynicism.

Even Grendel's death is part of a happily gory set of metaphysical and aesthetic speculations and jokes. To the end, Grendel stands up for meaninglessness, matter, accident. Beowulf, bright invincible hero, tortures him by insisting that "time is the mind." There's something of a modern novelist there. And, to nobody's surprise, Beowulf speaks for art. Holding Grendel's painful and fated arm behind the monster's back, Beowulf smashes Grendel's head against the wall:

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> "Grendel, Grendel! You make the world by whispers, second by second. Are you blind to that? Whether you make it a grave or a garden of roses is not the point. Feel the wall: is it not hard?"

Then, most miserable of tortures, he demands: "Sing! . . . Sing walls." And Grendel sings. But faithful to his imagination of a world without imagination, Grendel flees, one arm missing, into the woods. "Accident," he shouts. "Accident," he whispers.

The melange of fantasy, parody, philosophy, theories of imagination, works beautifully, so beautifully that I suppose I care more for Grendel than for any other Gardner character. Monstrously dying alone in the woods, he cries for his "Mama." And his last words form a curse to our very pleasures in reading it: "Poor Grendel's had an accident," he says, "So may you all."

Having tried just about everything else in the way of story telling, Gardner gives us, in *The King's Indian*, a volume of short stories and a novella. All of them are more or less overtly autobiographical, or are made to seem that way; and without really telling us much about him (except what I guess his friends would pick up) they nevertheless ring true. They are full of professorial fun, cloaked in science fiction or gothic horror or fairy tale. And yet each of them has a central figure who seems very Gardnerish. The first hero is a man of words, a preacher in a Southern Illinois Church (near, coincidentally, where Gardner teaches). He has evoked the distrust of his parishioners because he insists on social responsibility, and he inadvertently attracts a revolutionary youth to blow up his church. And what is the power of language? The second hero is a Southern Illinois doctor, caught in a cyclone during which he finds a mad and wicked genius who clones himself into wicked young duplicates. The third is a medieval monk in a Browningesque complication of envy and haunting who has given up his art of illuminating manuscripts to work in the fields. And so on. In one story Gardner figures as an actor himself, the narrator describing a wild artist who has come through a period of darkness to see "the best in everything."

In their brevity and in their more or less obvious and deliberate evocation of Poe, Kafka, Browning, medieval romance, and science fiction, these stories are all fairly effective. But the book gets much better as Gardner's manifestations become more and more wildly fanciful, less and less disguised in the clothing of the real. The second set of three stories is pure fantasy, playing with the narrative traditions of the fairy tale, transmogrifications and heroic rescues, reminding us of the arbitrariness of sequence and characterization, and, of course, of *Alice in Wonderland*. The insane and beautiful Queen Louisa invents a family and a world, happy (except for occasional lapses into a toad) in the midst of playful violence and horror which purports to be sane and obeys quite arbitrary rules.

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But the novella, "The King's Indian," may be the best thing Gardner has done so far. It is so dazzlingly literary, so promiscuously allusive and parodic, that it would seem impossible to take the narrative seriously. But Gardner's ultimate virtuosity is that while making fun of some of the central narratives of the last two hundred years, he has to bring us up short at the end of every section in order to disengage us from the mere story, to force us to face the fact that there are other larger issues. It is the work of an effective Sunlight Man, of a real trickster whose tricks are his real subject.

Of course, the ostensible narrator of the story, Jonathan Upchurch, a nineteenth century American mariner out of Nantucket (oh!), is really John Gardner, though he isn't really. We know too much to associate a narrator with the real author—or to dissociate him. Anyway, there's a fine and quietly funny illustration (at last, in "The King's Indian," Gardner has got himself a first-rate illustrator, as all nineteenth century novelists should), a drawing of a wall-eyed young man, surely Jonathan Upchurch, dressed like a young ancient mariner, surely John Gardner, as any dust jacket picture will confirm. He stoppeth two of three. And sure enough, near the end, John Gardner, happily loose and seriously unserious, having played almost as many tricks as one hundred fifty pages will sustain, enters to talk: "And you are real, reader, and so am I, John Gardner the man that, with the help of Poe and Melville and many another man, wrote this book. And this book, this book is no child's top either—though I write, more than usual, filled with doubts. Not a toy but a queer cranky monument, a collage: a celebration of all literature and life; an environmental sculpture, a crypt."

I honor the words, though they teeter on embarassment: a queer and cranky monument—to Poe and Melville, to Coleridge and Conrad, to Dickens, to Whitman and Mark Twain, to Mary Shelley and Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, to the traditions of narrative and the possibilities of belief. This strange retelling of the ancient mariner's story is the record of a hoax, and of hoaxes within hoaxes, of enormous and gratuitous lies; and it is a celebration of hoaxing. The question remains—and it will, I think, be the test of Gardner's art as he develops and faces the doubts with which he says he is now writing—whether, while a celebration of literature, it is a celebration of life as well.

The story is full of the staple elements of Gardner's fictions: the magician, the materialist cynic, the redemptive power of love. Particularly, it is a desperately funny and simply desperate struggle to make narrative work beyond all embarassment; and it is built on the faith that narrative is the way to say yes to life. No matter how far Upchurch pushes, he can't quite get to the center of the hoax. Each villain fades into another, while the price of the game

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goes up in the cost of lives. Yet Upchurch ends with the holy ghost sitting on his shoulder in the form of a sea-boobie. As the ship tacks alee (what a marvelous set of pages parodying technical sea talk we get here from the boy who dreamed of living in Southern Illinois) he cries to the bird, "You better hang on there, bird," to which the Holy Ghost replies, "Hang on yourself, thou fucking lunatic."

The ultimate redemption here, as in most of Gardner's work, may not be of souls, but of narrative. The raped and disfigured Miranda (woops! Shakespeare) "blesses him unawares" by loving him; but neither Upchurch nor Gardner concludes by throwing his story into the sea and living without magic. Neither can survive without stories, without lies, without hoaxes.

With all this extraordinary inventiveness, Gardner is faced with the problems of many of the best writers of our time: how to work in a medium for which their imaginations thirst—in a kind of dead sea—but which everything they know makes them distrust. In allowing himself to play these wild games out in the open, to temper his half-embarassed solemnities with arch professorial and obscene jokes, Gardner may be getting close to honoring his own best instincts as a writer. Still healthily afraid of making sense of appearances, myths of his stories, it's certain Gardner wants to do it. Even if the Holy Ghost is obscene, he is some kind of spirit. As the hero of the Browningesque story earlier in the book suggests, "It's nerve-wracking business, knight-errantry." Still, Gardner is doing his knight-errant's trick almost everywhere in this volume. Now if he can only continue being open about the games he plays. . .

George Levine

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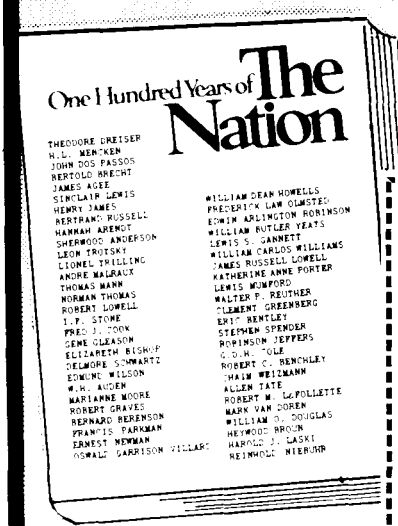

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THE MASTER BUILDER

THE POWER BROKER: ROBERT MOSES AND THE FALL OF NEW YORK. By Robert Caro. Alfred A. Knopf. $17.95.

When John Lindsay first ran for the New York City mayoralty, he campaigned against the "powerbrokers," charging that these villains—whom he never named—were largely responsible for the city's problems. Robert Caro's monumental but sprawling biography of Robert Moses borrows Lindsay's term and the idea behind it to argue that Moses was solely responsible for New York City's building program between about 1930 and 1968, that he decided how and what to build mainly to obtain more power, and that he was therefore responsible for what Caro calls, in his subtitle, the fall of New York. This thesis compliments Moses by accepting his own assessment of his importance to the city, but fails to pay sufficient attention to the role of the economic and political system within which Moses worked, and which ultimately made his success possible.

The basis of that system is public works money, which flowed particularly generously during the Depression and the post World War II era when Moses built his most important projects. Public works money not only produces public works, however, it also creates jobs and profits for many people, in construction, banking and insurance, among others. Above all, public works money is necessary to the urban political organization, for it has no dependable source of funds to finance election campaigns, and the day-to-day expenditures of political parties, politicians and party workers.

To be sure, urban politics can be funded in other ways, but public works projects are especially suitable, because they involve huge and long-term expenditures, and because the complexity of the planning and building process allows funds for legitimate political activities, as well as for honest and dishonest graft, to be skimmed off the top without undue public notice. Equally significant, the finished projects are viewed as desirable indicators of municipal "progress" by the affluent voters, who will therefore support the politicians that take credit for building them, and who will not object to some corruption as long as they are built.

Caro's bitter celebration of Moses' abilities is understandable, for the man was extraordinary, brilliant to the point of genius, with inexhaustible energy, a strong personality, and a stubborn vision: to create a comprehensive park and highway network for the city. A driven man, he was also vindictive, manipulative, and unscrupulous; a bully prepared to use immoral means to satisfy his vision wherever necessary.

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Nevertheless, Moses' particular genius, and a major reason for his success, lay in his ability to pursue his ends by satisfying the demands of powerful economic and political blocs and citizens, without, however, becoming their servant. He attached himself to Al Smith shortly before he became Governor of New York, and from him obtained the legal authority and the first funds to build parks and parkways. His initial success gave him enough surplus funds to make plans for future projects, and to be ready with such plans when the federal government began to funnel construction money to the city during the Depression. By then, he had also built an empire which was completely free from public accountability, except to the bondholders who financed his highway projects, so that he had total control over large amounts of construction money at a time when the city was bankrupt. As a result, it could only build the projects Moses wanted built; more important, all the businessmen, lawyers, unions, and politicians whose livelihood came from public funds were dependent on his largesse, and gave him their allegiance in exchange for the contracts, campaign funds, etc., only he could provide.

Still, the primary reason for Moses' success was the coincidence of his vision with the interests of the city's increasingly affluent white middle class. First, Moses gave them the parks and beaches at which they could spend their new leisure time, and to which they could drive on his parkways in their new cars; just as important, Moses anticipated and shared their antipathy to mixing with poor and especially poor black people, effectively barring them from these facilities by not permitting buses on the parkways. Later, the white middle class New Yorkers who had moved to the suburbs before and after World War II could use these parkways and the other highways Moses would build to commute to the city, and once again, Moses helped see to it that they would have no poor neighbors by preventing the construction of mass transit. And toward the end of his career, Moses built urban renewal projects—and cultural centers—for affluent people who wanted to stay in the city. In return, the middle class population of the entire metropolitan area gave Moses whatever political support he needed to maintain and enlarge his power, so much so that none of the nominally more powerful politicians who wanted to fire him could do so, including Mayor LaGuardia, Governor Lehman, and even President Roosevelt.

Caro's claim that New York's building program could not have materialized without Moses is belied by the fact that after World War II, most other American cities constructed exactly the same highways and urban renewal projects, and while many copied Moses' plans, they too were responding to the demands of middle class voters, and wanted the jobs, profits and political funds that flowed from the construction projects. Moses

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was unique in his ability to dominate the building process, but he was also aided by the extreme decentralization of New York City politics, its weak mayor system, and its lack of home rule, all of which helped to create power vacuums that he immediately filled. Moses built more and more quickly than anyone else, but many of his projects would eventually have been built anyway, even without him.

In the course of his career, Moses made innumerable enemies, not only among the displaced poor, but also among other New Yorkers who were left without the facilities and services, for example hospitals, which could not be provided because so much of the city's budget was preempted by Moses' projects. Eventually, their protests caught up with him, and Moses' power began to decline in earnest after Lindsay was first elected mayor with the help of a sizeable ghetto vote. Moses contributed to his own demise by allowing highly visible corruption in his urban renewal projects, and once the reporters had uncovered it, they revenged themselves, in Watergate style, for the many ways in which Moses had attacked and shackled them for over a generation. Nelson Rockefeller finally toppled Moses, although not because he was hungrier for power, as Caro suggests, but because he had the backing of David Rockefeller, who represented the bondholders, and because he was willing to continue to build, thus obtaining the allegiance of Moses' supporters, and making Moses himself superfluous.

If Caro is wrong to argue that Moses alone caused the fall of New York, he is also wrong to insist that New York has fallen. Caro's own vision for New York is a high-density city, with as few automobiles, expressways and suburbs as possible, but the suburbanization of the city began before Moses was born, and the further suburbanization he facilitated has made life considerably more pleasant for the city's middle classes. Their New York has not fallen, but has only moved beyond the city limits, and from their perspective, Moses' one-man planning was exemplary, for it created a relatively integrated park and highway network that avoided some of the faults of piecemeal planning in other cities.

Of course, from the perspective of the New Yorkers then and now living in the city, many of Moses' projects were a tragic mistake, for they need, not the highways and Long Island parks Moses built but the housing he tore down and the mass transit proposals he sabotaged. In addition, Moses hurt the city by permitting bondholders and others to make unreasonable profits which are still being paid out, and by his systematic assaults on the democratic process, even though the protests these generated ultimately helped to bring about the somewhat more democratic approach to public construction which now prevails. Ironically, in the last chapter of his book, Caro begins to reconsider his judgment of Moses, wondering whether Moses' ability to produce, even by

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undemocratic means, is not superior to the more democratic approach of the Lindsay administration, which resulted in much debate but little building. After seven years of work on this book, Caro may have been more affected by his subject's obsession with building than he himself realizes, but he is also right to imply that democracy and efficient public building are not entirely compatible. Still, the interlocking public authority system which Moses established is particularly unresponsive to the public will, and Caro properly recommends that it be eliminated.

Unfortunately, Caro's emphasis on Moses' villainy persuades him to judge Moses' actions and decisions as purely moral choices, implying that a well-intentioned builder would have made better plans. This is naive, for given the distribution of economic and political power in the city during the Moses era, even the most altruistic or democratic planners could not have acted much differently—if they wanted to build, and while they might have caused somewhat less harm than Moses, none could have implemented Caro's vision, or held back the suburban exodus.

Moreover, Caro's understandable and praiseworthy need to document Moses' guilt makes him so eager to explain Moses' plans as expressions of his psychopathological drive for power, and later for spite and revenge, that he often neglects to report the man's own reasons for his plans, failing to ask, for example, why Moses made decisions which, by Caro's account, seem totally irrational and even politically harmful to Moses, or to consider what political and other calculations went into Moses' planning. Fortunately, Caro has dug out so much hard-to-find and previously secreted information about Moses, as well as about the city in which he worked and has reported it in such detail that his findings can be used without accepting his overly moralistic and psychological explanations. Caro's reportage, although at times distorted by his need to exaggerate Moses' power, is a superb achievement, but Caro should have given more credit to the power structure which enabled his powerbroker to build as he did, for it is the principal villain in the morality play he has written.

Herbert J. Gans

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LIFE-SIZE

ENORMOUS CHANGES AT THE LAST MINUTE. By Grace Paley. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $6.95.

Enormous Changes at the Last Minute is not, as advertised by some reviewers, inferior to *The Little Disturbances of Man*. It is a different book by the same author (who, changed by life and time, is also a little different here), a continuation of the other, a further exploration. Where Grace Paley's first book, for all its originality and surprise, is a collection of by and large traditionally made stories, the second is made up of a number of seeming fragments, an indication not of haste ("art is too long and life is too short," the author modestly tells us), but of a distillation of materials, a more daring openness of form. Paley's titles, *The* Little *Disturbances of Man* (emphasis mine) and Enormous *Changes at the Last Minute*, playing off the first, refer to size in an exaggerated, essentially ironic way. The author's characterization of what she's about, an occasion for the literal-minded to complain she has not given us the major (meaning large) work we've been led to expect, is a little like Cordelia's representation of her love to her father. Paley is often at her best in *Enormous Changes*—her fiction at its most consequential—in the smallest space.

In *Enormous Changes*, as in the first collection, Paley writes about families, about lost and found love, about divorce, death, ongoing life—the most risky and important themes—in a style in which words count for much, sometimes for almost all. The stories—in some cases, the same stories—deal on the one hand with their own invention and, on the other, profoundly (and comically) with felt experience. In this sense, and in a wholly unschematic way, Paley combines what has been called the "tradition of new fiction" in America with the abiding concerns of the old.

Grace Paley's stories resist the intrusion of critical language about them, make it seem, no matter what, irrelevant and excessive. The stories are hard to write about because what they translate into has little relation, less than most explication, to what they are: themselves, transformed events of the imagination. The voice of Paley's fiction—quirky, tough, wise-ass, vulnerable, bruised into wisdom by the knocks of experience—is the triumph and defining characteristic of her art.

"An Interest in Life," probably the best piece in *The Little Disturbances of Man*, and one of the best American stories of the past twenty-five years, illustrates Paley's mode. A story initially about a husband's desertion of a wife and four children, it opens: "My husband gave me a broom one Christmas.

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This wasn't right. No one can tell me it was meant kindly." The matter-of-fact, ironic voice of the protagonist, Ginny, distances the reader from the conventions of her pathos, makes light of easy sentiment, only to bring us, unburdened by melodrama, to an awareness of the character as if someone known to us intimately for a long time. Ginny, in a desperate moment, writes out a list of her troubles to get on the radio show, "Strike it Rich." When she shows the list to John Raftery, a returned former suitor unhappily married to someone else, he points out to her that her troubles are insufficient, merely "the little disturbances of man." Paley's comic stories deal in exaggerated understatement, disguise their considerable ambition in the modesty of wit.

"Distance" in *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* is a retelling of some of the materials of "An Interest in Life" through the self-justifying (also self-denying) point of view of Ginny's officious neighbor, Mrs. Raftery. "You would certainly be glad to meet me," Mrs. Raftery introduces herself, "I was the lady who appreciated youth." The victories Mrs. Raftery claims for herself are undermined by events, defeated by her own story. "Distance" begins in self-assertion and ends with the narrator's loneliness and mystification.

Time, or the shortness of time, is at issue in almost all of the stories in the new collection. "Debts" is about the obligations writers have, or that the narrator feels writers ought to have, to keep the people close to them alive by giving voice to their stories and the stories of their families. It is an impossible obligation—impossible like the "wants" of the story of that title—which the narrator tries hopelessly (and successfully) to fulfill.

In "Wants," the narrator returns two overdue books to the library—the books overdue for eighteen years—and meets a former husband; the meeting and conversation are like a creation of the narrator's imagination, a day dream or obsessive fantasy. What comes out of it for the woman is a catalogue of her failures—her best intentions, her "wants" defeated by fleeting time and the ordinary, quirky circumstances of a life. The occasion for "Wants" is metaphoric, its details hyperbolic, but the story touches us through its humanity and perception—Paley's vision like nothing else—as strongly as if it were taking place in that literary convention we call the "real world."

An improvisatory casualness is another of the disguises of Paley's fiction. A high degree of technical sophistication is its true condition. Paley's stories rarely insist on their own achievement, deny their own audacity, her craft to cover its own traces. To say that Paley is knowing as a writer is not to imply that her work relies in any way, obvious or subtle, on formula. Each of Paley's stories is a separate discovery, as if she begins again each time out to learn what it is to make a story.

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Themes and characters move into one another from story to story. Life is too short, moving too quickly (all of us going in private directions) to do all the things one means to do. "Living" is about a missed connection, about the distraction of being caught up in one's own life. At the start, a friend, Ellen, calls Faith, the narrator of the story, to announce that she's dying. Faith reports, not altogether metaphorically, that she's dying too. Ellen dies; Faith recovers, her own dying (and living) precluding involvement in Ellen's. At the end, Faith comes to an abrupt realization of her friend's death and, correspondingly, the implications of her own survival. The economy of the story—it runs barely two and a half pages—makes it all the more powerful, avoiding, as Paley almost always does, easy emotional appeals or inflated sentiment.

"The Burdened Man" also deals with survival and renewal. A man, anxious about money, which is to say loss of self, becomes friends, outgrowth of a public fight, with a neighbor's wife. "Now," he decides, "it was time to consider different ways to begin to make love to her." He goes to the woman's house one Sunday and is confronted by her husband, a policeman, who shoots up the kitchen and wounds the burdened man. Passion and survival unburden the title character of his displaced obsessions. "Until old age startled him, he was hardly unhappy again."

These brief accounts of narratives do limited justice to the specialness of Paley's stories. Her sentences are small miracles of their own, risky, deceptively simple, capable of unexpected turns and flights. For example:

> He leaned over the rail and tried to hold her eyes. But that is hard to do for eyes are born dodgers and know a whole circumference of ways out of a bad spot.
>
> He had had a habit throughout the twenty-seven years of making a narrow remark which, like a plumber's snake, could work its way through the ear down the throat, halfway to my heart.

Paley is a major writer working in what passes in our time as a minor form. Her short fiction has continually deceived media, that system of mirrors that tends to discover the very things it advertises to itself, into taking it for less than it is. "A Conversation with my Father," my favorite of the second collection, concerns itself in part with the making of fiction. The narrator's father asks her why she doesn't write simple stories like de Maupassant or Chekhov. "Just recognizable people and then write down what happened to them next." To please her father, to prove the task hopeless, she offers him (and us) in abbreviated form a plain story, a self-fulfilling failure since the narrator holds that "Everyone, real or imagined, deserves the open destiny of life." The father complains that she leaves everything out, and Paley's nar-

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rator invents another, more elaborate version of the same story. The longer version is no closer to the kind of story the father wants, and he berates her for making jokes out of "Tragedy." "A Conversation with my Father" is by implication a self-criticism, a limiting and defining of mode, yet, symptomatic of Paley's best work, it illustrates by example the large and complex seriousness she affects (as if placating the gods) to deny herself.

Jonathan Baumbach

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THE PEOPLE, YES

THE REAL FOUNDATIONS. LITERATURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE.
By David Craig. Oxford University Press. $8.95.

Where radical American culture is typically innovatory, its British counterpart is renovatory. My own experience in both countries confirms the core of truth in the cliché that whereas the past means less than it should to most Americans, it tends to dominate the British imagination to a paralyzing degree. Admittedly there's currently a nostalgia boom in the United States—the fifties, short hair, old movies—but such rainbows are not anchored below the horizon. The British are perpetually searching for true values, for that moment of authentic experience, in some past age of austerity or national danger when life was (apparently) sane, cohesive, and "real." An exultant festival dedicated to the Age of Steam—steam locomotives, steam rollers, steam organs, steam tractors—is held annually on a wild Dorset hilltop and attracts ten thousand pilgrims a day. The BBC, forsaking the shabby present, has abandoned practically its entire schedule to radio comedians of the thirties, forties, and—for our younger listeners—the fifties. A nurse currently tending a hospital ward of geriatrics pointed out to me how old people whose minds have gone tend to imagine themselves to be eternally inhabiting one particular, crystallized past situation. In this particular ward of University College Hospital, the most popular choice is the war, the blitz; one old lady, ever alert to the wailing sirens and the menacing throb of the Heinkels overhead, regularly orders her bed-ridden neighbors down into the Piccadilly underground station, a call enthusiastically heeded amid a bedlam of clattering bedpans and wailing nurses.

The "real foundations" to which David Craig's title refers are really historical, cultural, linguistic and geographical roots which an industrialized society and particularly its sophisticated writers take for granted or ignore until it is too late—almost. Thus, in search of authenticity, the road ahead must be the road back to folksong, the poetry of dialect, the vernacular of ordinary people. Time and again in the history of British literature, as Craig sees it, redemption and refreshment have emanated from voices close to the provincial working class, after the polite, metropolitan arts had elaborated themselves into a dead-end. This was true of the demotic novel of Defoe and Fielding, the poetry of Burns, the fiction of Dickens, and of the era of Shaw, Wells, and Lawrence. More recently, the New Wave of the fifties rescued us from "three decades in which literature of some significance was written by metropolitan intellectuals."

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As Craig says, many of these new writers were of the people: Behan, a house painter from Dublin; Alan Sillitoe, who began his working life in the Raleigh bicycle factory in Nottingham; Shelagh Delaney, a shop assistant from Salford; David Storey, a miner's son from the West Riding of Yorkshire who once played professional rugby. (There are others, of course, who do not fit into this social mold, and in any case the reward, or price, of success is normally a flat in London and integration into some faction of the loose fraternity of metropolitan intellectuals.) But when Craig comes to analyze the value of this populist renaissance, I can only partly agree with him.

Craig treats the blessings of the New Wave as moral, social and literary. Now it is certainly true that many of these writers, particularly the novelists, quickly bridged the gap between low- and high-brow audiences and brought home to both groups the old truth that literature can, seriously and amusingly, deal with commonplace reality (work) as well as exotica or studied seediness. They also produced a literature of class which, evading recent Marxist pitfalls, marvellously conveyed an underlying British populist characteristic: hatred of the boss and "them" combined with a distrust of politics. They showed us an industrial Britain, still grey and filthy under the shadow of its satanic mills, where a young worker for the first time had enough money in his pocket to mount a powerful motorbike and demonstrate his iconoclasm noisily and sometimes violently. As Sillitoe's hero Arthur Seaton put it, "No one's telling *me* what to do." This was both new and a return to an older tradition: with the outstanding exception of Orwell, the literary rebels of the thirties, almost invariably public school and Oxbridge, had been as low on knowledge of the Common People as they had been high on Marxism.

Craig explains the social basis of this new writing very well; in other words, he patiently explores the fabric of a counter-culture which, unlike its American variant, did not self-consciously label itself as such, but which came to dominate the cultural landscape at a time, paradoxically, when the Tories were winning one election after another with the slogan, "You've Never Had It So Good." But Craig also pleads literary virtues for the New Wave which I am more reluctant to accept. He believes that the return to vernacular sources brings literature closer to its characters, avoids the aloof, standing-back posture of writers like Eliot, Greene and Auden, who rely on "received standard" English, and, finally, permits "ordinary life" to dramatize itself "in its own medium" with a bluntness which can be subtle, rich and morally searching.

It is here that Craig, in my opinion, is contributing to the paralyzing nostalgia so endemic in British culture. Here again we have in essence a reaffirmation of the mimetic aesthetic principles of the nineteenth century,

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the belief that art triumphs where it disguises its own artifices. But, however staunch our moral principles, the only authentic epistemology now available to us is that of doubt, relativity, self-consciousness. Craig will not have this; he comes to literature as a Roundhead, serious, devout, scrupulous, with a clear light in his eyes, testing his Shakespeare, Dickens, Lawrence, and Hugh MacDiarmid with the touchstone of Truth, and flaying Eliot's *The Waste Land* for its supercilious cynicism and snobbery.

Yet this is a lively and thoughtful book. Here is a critic who, contrary to the current fashion, has not entered into competition with the authors he studies; who does not feel compelled, in order to make his name, to discharge crescendos of verbal and emotional pyrotechnics in the course of his ego-trip; a critic who is unashamed about the awe and pleasure good writing engenders, and who lends us his intelligence without simultaneously selling himself.

David Caute

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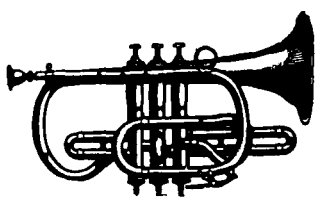

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THE GUMBO THAT JES GREW

THE LAST DAYS OF LOUISIANA RED. By Ishmael Reed. Random House. $5.95.

Ishmael Reed's first novel, *The Free-Lance Pallbearers*, hoo-doo'd those sympathetic critics who instinctively praise the first novels of young Black writers. There was nothing to praise in *Pallbearers*—no privileged insights into negritude, no angry calls for social justice, no trade at all on the racy material of Black experience. Instead Reed caricatured the typical hero of the "Neo-Slave Narrative" and relentlessly parodied its traditional rhetoric. What *is* it like to grow up in Soulsville? To make one's way from Chattanooga to the grim projects on Buffalo's East Side and finally into the "Now-here" world of New York City? Doopeyduk's progress through the world of Hairy Sam is set forth in episodes as sharply delineated as cartoon frames. Ralph Ellison's epiphanies are reduced to pratfalls, James Baldwin's careful discriminations are heaved like pies at the reader, and indeed the pieties of that exemplary fiction are turned one by one inside out—reversed, ridiculed. The subject of *Pallbearers* is the monstrosity of American life, but the full force of Reed's ire falls upon the conventional modes of telling the Black man's role in that life. Doopeyduk's foolish innocence in the novel, his resolute dedication to good grammatical English, the Nazarene Code, and Success, thus marks in large farcical letters the loss of Reed's own innocence as a Black writer, his refusal to enter Afro-American literature through the usual door.

Since that denial in 1967, Reed has produced two books of poetry, *Conjure* and *Chattanooga*, and three affirmative novels: *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down, Mumbo Jumbo,* and *The Last Days of Louisiana Red*. In this fiction he has tried to do a number of difficult things at once and not always succeeded. Too often the satirist and the mythmaker are at odds in his narrative, and there are times, particularly in *The Last Days*, his most recent novel, when this tension is ruinous. On such occasions, his free-flowing style breaks down deplorably. "He then slaps her against the cheek," we are told in *The Last Days*, "and with his hands lifts her up and then gently rests her on him in a fashion that his Dong shoots up all in her hot wet orifice and like a sneaky SAM missile starts probing for them secret dark places. She starts convulsing and trembling like a 3-point Richter-scale earthquake, her passion stemming from a deep fault in her soul." This passage is knowingly purpled, of course, written to dismiss jokingly Street's rape of the militant Amazon who captains

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Minnie the Moocher's bodyguard, but the point beneath the purple, that these brutal man-hating broads, the Dahomeyan Softball Team, are at long last easily broken by the one sure of male supremacy, the heat-seeking SAM missile, is nonetheless made. Or so it seems.

There is a good deal of elusive action in *The Last Days*; in fact the novel itself, for all its explosive topics, is ultimately evasive. Reed's attack on Minnie the Moocher is curiously blunted, she is generously restored to her sweet self at the end of the novel, while Street, her male counterpart, is conveniently killed midway through the book. Yet they are initially established as the prime agents of Louisiana Red, the vile hot sauce that ruins the Gumbo, and it is, one might argue, somewhat disconcerting to find them finally revealed as the mere dupes of masquerading Whites. Although broadly drawn, Street is indeed a promising character, a cynical Bigger Thomas on the verge of Cleaverhood. Minnie not only suggests the person of Angela Davis, but more importantly stands forth as the deluded daughter of a long line of powerful Black mothers who helped break the balls of their vulnerable men. To underscore this aspect of her character, an itinerant musician named Chorus wanders through the novel complaining of Antigone's usurpations. Potent figures, rich themes, complex problems—yet Reed seemingly retracts his satire at the last moment, deprives Minnie of her substance, and concentrates instead on Maxwell Kasavubu, a White *apparatchik* still living his life in Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Louisiana Red emerges as a comprehensive metaphor, the endemic disunity of the Black Nation in America writ large: "negroes stabbing negroes," crabs in a barrel, "Each crab trying to keep the other one from reaching the top." Yet in this spacious metaphor the hot issues of Reed's analysis (Street's criminality, Minnie's feminist rage, the Black matriarchy) are somewhat blurred.

The problem in *The Last Days* is Papa LaBas, the old man from down there, a patriarchal *houngan* who first appears in *Yellow Back Radio* and then serves as the focal character in *Mumbo Jumbo*. He is the voice Reed has given to his mythology (Neo-HooDoo) and as such, tirelessly discoursing, he calmly dominates the hectic plot of *The Last Days*. Each of these three novels variously repeats the mythos of Neo-HooDoo. Loop Caroo's "connaissance" in *Yellow Back Radio* is the knowledge of myth, a knowing that is at once a way of being in the world, and this knowledge, rooted in the lore of West Indian voodoo, links him to the myth of Osiris. He is indeed Black Osiris reborn, and Drag Gibson, the LBJ-like rancher, none other than Set in whiteface. Taking first the familiar yellowbacked Western as his narrative model, and then in *Mumbo Jumbo* the pulp detective-adventure fiction, Reed has retold their essential conflict in his own terms and at the same time set forth an ambitious reinterpretation of past and present Afro-American

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literature. Yet certain formal problems remain, not the least of which is the introduction of a great deal of unfamiliar material. In *Yellow Back Radio* Reed filters these arcane legends and strange terms through the student wars in Berkeley and Oakland, sticking close to evident historical parallels, but even then he needs an operatic Pope to intervene finally with the larger mythic perspective. In *The Last Days* he simply allows Papa LaBas to catechize the reader, and the result is a heavyhanded underscoring of the text. A rich and complex history underlies these narratives, a history in which Marie Philome and Doc John are important figures. Yet how does one get these names and events to resonate and refer without footnotes and glossaries?

In *Mumbo Jumbo*, his best work to date, the satirist and mythmaker work in unison. Reed's subject is the phenomenon of Jes Grew, the development of ragtime in American culture, and in pondering its significance he calls into question the whole of the Harlem Renaissance. How did Black writers interpret Jes Grew? Why did they fail to incorporate its meaning into their art and effectively create a new fiction and poetry as innovative and forceful as jazz? Reed grapples with the figure of Carl Van Vechten who, as Hinckle Von Vampton, moves elusively through the novel seeking to capture the essence of Osirian wisdom (as transcribed in *The Book of Thoth*) in order to contaminate its purity. Papa LaBas scrutinizes the various attitudes taken toward "primitivism" during the renaissance and comes to learn, thanks to certain Haitian emissaries, the correct approach. The question really is how the phenomenon of Jes Grew (that sudden awakening of Osirian consciousness) is to inform one's art. Black writers in the twenties dealt with "primitivism" through a system of values that were not natively Black, Reed argues, and thus wrote fiction that was tortured in its sensibility, torn between mind and body, fiction that never shook loose from its mooring in Anglo-American literature. They gave consent to Van Vechten's exploitation of their experience and themselves wrote versions of *Nigger Heaven*, novels in which "primitive" heroes lived high and quick in a constant state of coarse sensuality. There were writers, however, like Zora Neale Hurston, who took the mumbo jumbo of "primitivism" seriously, who learned its language and lore, and it is in their work that Papa LaBas discerns the relettering of the lost sacred text. For here the very concept of "primitivism" is abolished, Black consciousness is mythically reconsecrated, the integrity of knowledge restored to the Dance, and the cultural dualism that plagued the renaissance is effectively resolved. Improvisational, working out its own myths and forms, not solemn but witty, Black writing thus escapes from American literature, returns via West Indian ritual to its African sources, and becomes at last itself.

If only in the range of its assumptions, Reed's achievement in *Mumbo Jumbo* is considerable. Yet Papa LaBas's vision of a reformulated and clarified

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Black literature is prophetic in *Mumbo Jumbo*, not yet realized, and we leave off in the modern period with this ancient necromancer still construing the hopeful signs. Obviously the Hinckles remain, only now they teach courses in Black Lit at the University of California, and to that extent Papa LaBas's work is not finished. It is also evident that it is not just the Hinckles and Kasavubus who impede that work, who throw sauce into the Gumbo of the new consciousness, the new style. Here Reed is constrained in determining responsibility and forced back into the culture of the Black community itself, and here, perhaps not so surprisingly, he begins to sound somewhat like George Schuyler rumbling forth conservative diatribes in the *Pittsburgh Courier*. There has always been in Reed's fiction an involuted love/have relationship with Black history and the types it has engendered in popular mythology and literature. This revulsion is powerfully expressed in *Pallbearers*, which resembles Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* in its vitriolic exposures of domestic life. Unlike Roth, however, Reed has taken great pains in his subsequent fiction to create a constructive protagonist who embodies an intelligible morality. When Alex Portnoy goes back to Israel to touch his racial roots, to be renewed, he is instead stripped bare and rejected. Reed's Africa is a different place, a distributed Africa alive in Haiti and expressed in New Orleans, an Africa still powerful in its cures and spells. But in *The Last Days* Papa LaBas is not all that convincing in his powers, not all that intelligible in his "connaissance." For all of Reed's pregnant allusions, Gumbo seems more a business than the Business.

Reed's anti-moocherism is an attack not just on the Marxist cant of radical politics, but on something deeper in the Black psyche—moocherism itself, the slave's mentality. How does one break the sophistication of its hold on the mind, break through the cycles of abject dependency and wild aggression moocherism creates? Ed Yellings, Minnie's entrepreneurial father, is Reed's exemplar and Papa LaBas's protege. Clearly the first step is to turn away completely from the values of White America, a step that necessitates a revaluation of the concept of work and a separation of oneself from the regressive elements in the Black community. When Andy Brown and the Kingfish are caught by Amos in the act of robbing his house, they expect him to understand and excuse their criminality. Because, after all, they are all Black and each knows that crime in Soulsville is a necessary way of life. Amos's rebuke is straightforward: "You Moochers always intimidating us, extorting us because we're the same skin color; even insects and animals have a higher criterion than that for comradeship. It was just another protection racket, but we ain't going to be your old man in the candy store any longer. I'm calling the police." Minnie's ideological moocherism only rephrases the earlier forms of mooching and results in the same debasement, the same waste of initiative.

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In the dramatic encounter between Papa LaBas and Minnie, the scope of this attack is broadened. For it is not only the White world that imposes destructive attitudes on Black men. "You, Minnie," Papa LaBas declares. "You take yourself so seriously. You couldn't stand for your Dad and your brothers to run a Business as they sought. You and your roustabouts and vagrants just couldn't stand negro men attempting to build something; if we were on the corner sipping Ripple, then you would love us, would want to smother us with kindliness."

This is dangerous terrain. Papa LaBas's "old morality" is severely patriarchal in its values. White men and Black women have conspired in subjecting Black men in America, he argues, the former by direct repression, the latter through an indirect and subtle color coding of their sexual preferences, by their willingness to accept the White man's stereotypes of Black manhood. His discourse mounts into a fury of antifeminism. "A lot of you begged for him and fought over the trinkets he threw at you, nursed him and taught him how to fuck, loved the bastard children he gave you more than your own." And now "the old lovers have entered into a conspiracy to put the negro male into the kitchen and to death, and you can call me a male pig all you want, but I will do my utmost to stop you." But what is the solution to this problem? Although Reed somewhat ambivalently puts down Street's bullying machismo, it is nonetheless machismo that finally jars Minnie into an understanding of her proper role, allows her to perceive the salvation that lies in the acceptance of Blackness. She is taken to the Board of Directors who run the Business and there she meets Blue Coal. "Blue Coal had very large and sensual red lips which had the appearance of having been waxed. He was wearing hardly anything, and his penis could be seen, big, its tip almost touching the floor. He wore eagle feathers and was covered with white clay. He liked to beat on hollow things and boasted of saving the sun from darkness." We are back in Africa, to things as they once were in the good old days. Reed's satire breaks into a fantasy of reasserted male dominance. *Priapus ex machina*. From that point the novel limps to its conclusion praising the rugged individualism of Ed Yellings.

Like *Pallbearers*, then, *The Last Days* deals with the politics of Soulsville, and yet this novel lacks the malevolent intelligence that drives Reed's first novel. What intervenes is the construction of Reed's eclectic mythology, the construction of an obdurate positivism. Even as it provides him with a coherent mythos, Neo-HooDoo necessarily deflects the course of his satire. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, as we have seen, Reed's didacticism is ingeniously presented, woven into the narrative which is, after all, finally about the search for a narrative. But in *The Last Days*, Reed's mythology is used like a vacuum sweeper: it has all the answers within its system, Neo-HooDoo is the way, and

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therefore it efficiently absorbs all the difficult problems that Reed the satirist uncovers. No one can take seriously his rescue of Minnie at the end of the novel, nor can anyone overlook the fact that the business she at last learns does not have much to do with the confection of Gumbo. Indeed Reed has come to a problematical pass in his writing. The mythology of Neo-HooDoo does not inform his satiric reading of Black experience in *The Last Days*—it consoles that reading. If Blue Coal's chastisement of Minnie represents the restoration of order in Reed's mind, then Louisiana Red is hardly in its last days. Reed has yet to define himself as a writer, to choose between the rigorous demands of satire and the programmatic concerns of Neo-HooDoo.

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WRITERS' CHOICE

EDITORS' NOTE: Writers' Choice *is a new department of short comments on old as well as new books that our contributors like particularly and want to call attention to.*

RAYMOND FEDERMAN: Just read *Alphabetical Africa* by Walter Abish. (New Directions.) This one deserves more than just a sentence. It deserves a whole article. If this is where the American novel is going, there's hope. It's short. It can be read in two or three hours. It's incredible. Best fiction I've read since . . . Beckett . . . no since Calvino. Oh, yes, Calvino. Also just read *Invisible Cities*. (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.) Wow! is the American novel still in a state of infancy.

LEONARD MICHAELS: A magnificent labor—*The Illuminated Blake* (Doubleday Anchor)—all Blake's illuminations with splendid commentary by the most excellent Blakist, David V. Erdman. *Visionary Physics: Blake's Response to Newton*, by Donald Ault. (U. of Chicago Press.) A difficult, immensely exciting scholarly-critical analysis of Blake's psychomachia—scientitis vs. Imagination—which I had to read twice, and, in some places, ten times, and it was always worth the effort.

MARTIN DUBERMAN: My reading this past year has concentrated on the history of radicalism in the United States and, still more heavily, on the history of sexual behavior (in preparation for a new course and a new book). In both areas, a number of the best recent books have been ignored, under-reviewed or stupidly reviewed. On the history of radicalism, I want to call attention to three books: Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority* (Knopf: 1974.); Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, *Strikes in France, 1830-1968* (Cambridge: 1974.); and A. James Gregor, *The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics* (Princeton: 1974.). Wood's book is one of the few investigations of blacks in pre-Revolutionary America. It's remarkably imaginative in its use of source materials, confirming that much of what we assumed to be "unrecoverable" in the past is there to be found if traditional investigative procedures are broadened and traditional modes of perception expanded. Shorter and Tilly's book impressed me (as one who has often taken issue with quantitative history) as a splendid example of what *can* be accomplished through statistical measure-

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ment—that is, when the authors are sufficiently modest in their research goals and in their statement of findings (Shorter and Tilly are actually *amusing*, even self-mocking—rare and charming qualities in historians of any persuasion). I've so far been able to read only about one-third of Gregor's book—the section on Marxian economics—but I find it so stunningly lucid and persuasive that I have no trouble recommending the entire work. On the history of sexual behavior, I want to call attention to four books. One of them, Ann Oakley's *Sex, Gender & Society* (Harper & Row.) has been out for two years—and I've yet to see a review of it. And this despite the fact that I think it is far and away the best available summary of the anthropological and biological literature. It makes no pretense to original research or conceptualization, but it is so gifted a presentation as to give "popularization" a new dignity.

John S. Haller and Robin M. Haller have written an important monograph in *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (University of Illinois Press: 1974.). It's traditional in structure and merely straight-forward in style; but in opening up new source materials and in commenting ably on them, the Hallers have demonstrated (like Peter Wood) that we can—indeed have already begun—to recapture vital areas of our national experience.

Laurence Veysey's *The Communal Experience* (Harper & Row) has not been ignored (it was a Nominee for the National Book Award), but I think almost all the reviews have lamentably underrated or misunderstood it. What Veysey has done is to get us off the dime. He has studied a group of anarchist and mystical communes (19th and 20th centuries) that have been previously unknown or barely known. And—almost uniquely—he has included material on sexual behavior. All presented, moreover, with the skills of a first-class anthropologist (he's a historian by training) and the insights of a good novelist into human personality.

Finally, I want to recommend Dolores Klaich's new book *Woman Plus Woman* (Simon & Schuster.) The book impressed me on two grounds: the sheer amount of new information on lesbian history—and especially on the fascinating circle that gathered around Nathalie Barney in Paris—and also its tone—scrupulous, direct, gentle, and with a total absence of polemics or over-statement.

ISHMAEL REED: *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, edited by Jeffery Paul Chan, Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, Shawn Hsu Wong. (Howard

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University Press.) "Our anthology is exclusively Asian-American. That means Filipino, Chinese, and Japanese-Americans. American born and raised, who got their China and Japan from radio, off silver screen, from television, out of comic books, from pushers of white American culture that pictured the yellow man as something when wounded, sad, or angry, or swearing, or wondering whined, shouted, or screamed 'aiiieeeee'!" write Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong, in the stirring preface, a manifesto for an Asian-American renaissance.

Afro-American writers will find that Asian-American writers have received similar treatment from those purveyors of uni-cultural values: their use of English is subjected to picayune nitpicking; their characters are acceptable if they're "prostitute, smuggler, coolie, . . . lack manhood or are *actively offensive*"; if they "work with the imperatives and universals of minority experience and (apply) them to their work," they are "treated as . . . a quack witch doctor, a bughouse prophet, an entertaining fellow, dancing the heebie-jeebies in the street for dimes."

Afro-American writers who've said the same thing have been classified as "hysterical" or "paranoid." Now with yellow, red, and brown writers in agreement maybe soon we'll find out who's nuts.

Who Is Angelina?. By Al Young. (Holt, Rinehart and Winston.) Al Young puts the forms of the traditional novel to good use. He has a painter's eye, a musician's ear (did nightclub singing, Berkeley late 50s and was a disc jockey) is eloquent and does excellent parodies of a variety of Afro-American characters.

Angelina's treatment of the mugger at the novel's end will draw accusations of "right wing" or "conservative" but applying white political standards to those of blacks is risky business. Recent polls from *Black World* magazine, *Jet*, and the Gallup suggest that the majority of Afro-Americans would approve of Angelina's assault of the criminal, but, of course, "radicals" aren't interested in what the masses of Afro-Americans believe. They're only listening to these "vanguards" they keep laying on us.

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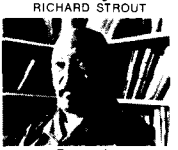
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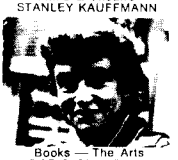
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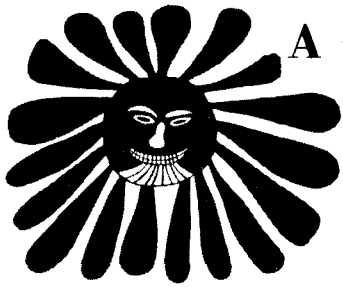

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